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ROBERT AINSLEIGH

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



LONDON

JOHN MAXWELL AND COMPANY

4 SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

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CONTENTS TO VOL. III.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE	1
II.	I FIND THAT I AM NOT FORGOTTEN	33
III.	I OBTAIN SATISFACTION	54
IV.	I SEEM TO BE INCONSTANT	74
V.	I BEGIN LIFE ON A NEW PLAN	95
VI.	IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH	122
VII.	AN UNEXPECTED ALLY	160
VIII.	I FIND MYSELF IN GREAT PERIL	194
IX.	I BEGIN TO REALIZE MY DANGER	230
X.	I BECOME DEEPER IN DEBT TO MARGERY	253
XI.	I COME INTO MY ESTATE	270
XII.	I REGAIN MY LIBERTY	290
XIII.	I FIND A PEACEFUL HAVEN	312
APPENDIX.		
	NOTE A	321
	NOTE B	323
	NOTE C	350

ROBERT AINSLEIGH.

CHAPTER I.

FACE TO FACE ONCE MORE.

WITHIN twenty-four hours of my interview with Mrs. Grimshaw I was again in London, a solitary stranger, with no concern but that dreary business of self-interest until such time as I could gratify man's natural desire for revenge by a meeting with Mr. Lestrange. I called in St James's Square immediately on my return; but the gentleman was not yet back, nor expected for above a week, so I had my time on my hands for that period. I was so fortunate as to find my old chambers in Brick Court vacant: here I once more took up my abode; and by the lonely hearth where my treacherous friend had found me, I sat and brooded over the strange destinies of betrayer and betrayed. And now I

became a haunter of taverns, not because I loved such places, but because I was like a foreigner in my native land, and was anxious to learn the ways of the town, and pick up any information with which strangers could furnish me about Sir Everard Lestrange. Of this gentleman the gay young Templars, with whom I for the most part associated, had plenty to tell me; but I knew the liveliness of their fancy, and that it needed some discrimination to distinguish fact from fiction in their narratives of the baronet's doings. Some of them affected to know him intimately, but when hard pressed, owned to merely a public knowledge of him. All agreed in declaring him distinguished among the bloods of his day by a bad eminence, and about his vices my informants were so unanimous that I could scarce doubt their veracity.

'He has a rage for actresses,' said one of a somewhat reprobate party which I had joined at supper, in a comfortable but obscure tavern close to the Temple gates, where some dozen or so of young law-students had formed a club by the name of Knights-errant.

'You had better say for an actress, Tom,' answered his friend; 'it is Mrs. Hunter he has

followed for these last two years. His passion is the talk of the town. And they say she will not listen to his suit, though he has offered to settle a handsome income on her, and sign a bond promising to marry her within six months of his present wife's death.'

'Good heavens, what iniquity!' I cried.

'Pshaw! my dear sir, since the elevation of Mr. Gay's Polly to the peerage there is a fashion for offering coronets to actresses; and shall a beggarly baronet be punctilious when a duke can put his pride in his pocket for the love of a pretty face? Why, Lady Lucretia Lovegrove ran away with an actor only the other day, and married the fellow before you could say Jack Robinson, at the very time when her friends were arranging an alliance between her ladyship and Lord Fitzpactolus, who owns half Somerset and three-quarters of Devonshire, and has half a million a year at the very least from a copper-mine in Cornwall—one of those monstrous landowners of whom it is said that England is fast becoming a heptarchy. But Mrs. Hunter is a living mystery—a virtuous actress: the rage of the town, and virtuous!'

'In spite of Sir Everard Lestrange?'

'In spite of better men than Sir Everard Lestrange,' replied the Templar, with a rakish shrug and simper. 'Why, I have been Mrs. Hunter's declared admirer myself for the last six months, and yet the citadel stands, though I will not say it has not tottered.'

'And pray where is this paragon to be seen, sir?' I asked.

'On the boards of Drury Lane, sir; where her talents and her beauty have enchanted the town for the last three years. It is said Garrick picked her up in a country booth, starving on a beggarly pound a week. She is the most versatile creature in the world; when she plays the fine lady, you would swear she had been born the daughter of a duke; yet she has but to dress herself as a country wench, and every word and look and gesture smells of green fields and rustic farmyards. Her Polly Peachum is an angel that has been reared among thieves; her Sir Harry Wildair is as fine as Woffington's: I have heard as much from those who remember that great actress in her prime. Pshaw! gentlemen, this sounds like a lover's fooling; but when I begin that divine creature's panegyric, I know not how to stop.'

'And it is this bright creature Sir Everard has pledged himself to ruin?'

'Ay, sir; so runs the talk of the town. Some say it is a wager, and that the baronet—who, though a profligate by the senses, is colder than ice at heart—would pursue no woman so furiously except from some great gain to himself.'

'I can believe anything of him that is mean or base,' said I; and the remark provoked no argument, for, well as the baronet was known to the assembly by reputation, no one present appeared to have heard any good of him.

I was eager to see the fair genius whose talents, or beauty, or fashion, had given her so powerful an influence over the profligate mind of my enemy; so, early on the next evening, I seated myself on one of the foremost benches in the pit of Drury Lane, having first assured myself that Mrs. Hunter had a part in the night's performance.

The play was *As You Like It*, with Mrs. Hunter in the part of Rosalind, and Mr. Garrick as the melancholy Jaques. Early as it was, the house was fast filling when I took my seat, and I found myself in the midst of a sort of critical club; a little knot of playgoers who came to the evening's entertainment

as epicures come to a feast—prepared to enjoy, but still more ready to criticise.

'I wonder Garrick cares to play so insignificant a part,' said one gentleman.

'Nay, sir,' replied a ponderous person in a shabby suit of brown; 'Jaques is no insignificant part. He has two of the finest orations in the whole of Shakspeare.'

'But the man has nothing to do.'

'Sir, there is no part in any play where a fine actor will not find something to do. Do you think when the Greek orator talked of action he meant only furious posturings and rushings from one end of the theatre to the other? No, sir. In that phrase Demosthenes included all those finer movements of physical nature by which a man reveals his emotion, from the hand uplifted to the gods to the faintest quiver of lip or nostril. There are characters in which any stroller can win applause; Richard the Third, for instance, whom Shakspeare made a sublime incarnation of evil, and in whose mouth Cibber has put such claptrap fustian as cannot fail to please the groundlings. But it is in such a part as Hamlet or Jaques the intellectual man can best display his powers, and I think Davy

does wisely to undertake the character. They say he is furiously jealous of this Mrs. Hunter, and that he only brought her forward to mortify Kitty Clive. She has been heard to complain of his unkindness—a frivolous fault-finding spirit that would fain thwart her in every original expression of her art.'

The curtain rose upon the first scene, but I, who was chiefly eager to behold Mrs. Hunter, paid little attention to the Shakspearian dialogue. I had not long to wait, for the second scene began with the entrance of two ladies, and a loud burst of applause from all the house told me that one of these was the paragon.

She swept the ground in a low curtsey, and seemed, as she rose, to survey the whole audience with one bright look of gratitude and pleasure. She was indeed a lovely creature, and I think in every part of her exquisite form, in every feature of her radiant face, approached as near perfection as humanity can do.

Upon me those flashing eyes shone with a familiar light, those rosy lips discoursed a well-remembered music. I sat dumbfounded, staring in amazement; for this wonder and divinity of all the

town was the woman with whom I had roved hand in hand beneath the oaks of Hauteville near twenty years ago. The odour of fallen leaves, the aromatic scent of pine-woods, came back to me as I looked at her. This untutored genius, whom the town had elevated into a goddess, was my foster-sister Margery!

Paralyzed by surprise, I sat through three acts of the play gazing at her, fixed as a statue, unconscious of surrounding objects as a sleep-walker. Her acting, like her beauty, seemed to me to be simple perfection. There was a freshness and innocence in her manner I have never since seen in any other actress. Every look, every action, seemed spontaneous as the singing of a bird. I think, indeed, that she had just the same delight in acting as a skylark has in his rapturous carollings when he soars into that upper heaven almost beyond our ken. For her to act was an intoxication; and once she had entered on the life of the banished duke's daughter, all the cares and memories of Mrs. Margery Hunter were blotted from the tablet of her brain, and she had neither griefs nor joys that were not Rosalind's. This she has told me long since that night; and Mr. Garrick

himself has confessed that, although he found her a strolling player in a barn, beyond the rudiments and veriest mechanism of her art he has never been able to teach her anything. All the rest was natural to her, and this great man was quick to recognize in her a genius as perfect and innate as his own.

The third act was finished before I stirred from my seat. I had seen Mistress Rosalind in her boyish dress, which was all that womanly coquetry could invent for man's bewitchment, and yet in no smallest detail sinned against feminine modesty. At last I roused myself by an effort from the spell which surprise had cast upon me, and made my way out of the theatre amid all the bustle of a full house, noisy with the bawling of orange-girls and the chatter of the audience, who were pleased to find their tongues at liberty, and made good use of the interval between the acts of the play.

Outside the house I inquired my way to the stage-door, and here I asked if it would be possible for an old friend to obtain speech with Mrs. Hunter before she left the theatre.

'Not till the play is done, were you her nearest relation,' answered the man in charge of the players'

entrance; 'for Mrs. Hunter will speak to no one while she is acting. But she sometimes receives company in her dressing-room before leaving the theatre, and if you will tell me your name, I will let her woman know that you desire to see her.'

'It would be better for me to write a note,' I said, 'if you can give me pen, ink, and paper.'

This the man was unable to do, so great was the bustle and confusion of people hurrying in and out, and I wondered to discover how many unseen workers were necessary to the production of a play. Finding the man unable to assist me, I ran across to a tavern on the other side of the street, where I wrote a few hasty lines to my foster-sister, entreating her to see me after the play. This I gave to the man, with a crown-piece, and he promised it should be delivered immediately.

I was assured he had kept his promise when Mrs. Hunter came on the stage in the scene that followed my return to the house, for there was a startled look on her face, and she gazed around the auditory in a way she had not done before. For the moment she had ceased to be Rosalind, and was occupied with her own emotions. I was not able to regain my old place among the critics in the centre of the pit,

and could get only standing-room in a corner, where I found myself close against a stage-box.

While I was gazing at the fair creature on the stage, who, I doubted not, was looking for me among the spectators, a voice sounded close at hand that sent a shot through me. It was the voice of my enemy, and it came from the stage-box.

'Who is Mrs. Hunter looking for to-night?' cried Sir Everard Lestrange; 'I thought she always minded her book, and she tripped twice in that last speech. Who is there in the house to attract the lady's brown eyes? There sits Horry Walpole grinning at the audience. What a dried anatomy it is! He has begun patching-up some gothic monstrosity at Twit'nam, and is trying to twist a very decent cottage, in which a man might live, into a compound of Westminster Abbey and his Castle of Otranto, which is only fit for a scene in a pantomime. And he leads that wretched Richard Bentley the life of a dog, collecting marbles and pictures for him, which, when collected, rarely please his virtuososhiip either in price or in quality, for he is as mean as he is critical. Is that Chesterfield yonder? Good heavens, how old the man is getting! He must be close upon seventy, and is growing deaf, I hear, into

the bargain. That sort of spectacle should be kept at home, wrapped in flannels and fed with gruel; it is a reminder as unpleasant as the skull at the Egyptians' feasts. Gad, Vernon, is she not lovely? Had Diana a more perfect form, or Venus a diviner face?'

This outburst of rapture and the remarks that had preceded it were spoken in that languid courtly voice which Everard Lestrange had always adopted, and were too low to offend the audience. The curtain presently fell on the fourth act, and I had leisure to observe the gentleman with whom I was so eager for a reckoning.

'I will go straight to his box,' I said to myself; but then it struck me that it would be wiser first to see my foster-sister, and hear all she could tell me about the career of her betrayer.

To find the seducer now the avowed and unsuccessful suitor of his cast-off mistress was a transformation which I should have believed impossible; and I knew not to what cause I could attribute so marvellous an effect. Was it the spirit of contradiction that had worked this miracle in a bad man's soul? Was it wounded vanity—the macaroni's base worship of fashion? I had afterwards reason

to know it was a compound of these feelings, a vile amalgam of obstinacy, conceit, and the fribble's slavish deference to the world's opinion. The country-girl whom Everard Lestrange lured from her home had soon tired so fine a gentleman; but the gifted woman whose perfections were the town-talk was a creature he languished to conquer. He had told people that she had been his mistress, and that he had wearied of her and cast her off; but unfortunately, lying on these subjects was so much the order of the day, that no one could be made to believe the truthful boaster.

The curtain once down, the gentlemen in the stage-box gave loose to their tongues; but as a fashionable profligate's conversation is of all discourses the least edifying, I will not trouble myself to record it here. I had heard enough to be sure that Sir Everard Lestrange was a faithless husband, and that he had pursued, and intended still to pursue, my foster-sister with a resolution that had more of hate than love.

'I had her in the dust at my feet once, Vernon,' he said, 'and I'll have her there again, and win my wager.'

'Faith, it is a wager worth winning, and will

make up to you for your losses to Staindale at White's last week. Was it seven or nine thousand he won from you at a *coup?*'

'Upon my life I think it was but seven. We had been doubling our stakes since dinner, and towards supper-time the play was getting high.'

These fine gentlemen were quiet enough during the last act, throughout which Sir Everard Lestrange lolled upon the cushion of his box with folded arms, regarding Mrs. Hunter with a fixed stare that was in itself sufficient to compromise an honest woman. Though he was near enough to the stage to render his presence obvious to her, she betrayed no consciousness of his existence, but played her part with the most lively, unembarrassed air possible, speaking a very foolish epilogue with enchanting grace and *naïveté*.

No sooner had the curtain fallen than I hurried to the stage-door, where I found the porter as eager as he had before been indifferent. I was to be pleased to go immediately to Mrs. Hunter's dressing-room, and a hanger-on of the playhouse was in readiness to conduct me thither. I followed this man with alacrity, by numerous darksome and narrow passages that smelt strongly of tallow and

lamp-oil. Alas, poor Margery, under what strange circumstances had we last met and parted! I had seen her kneeling at my feet, piteous, with clasped hands beseeching my mercy, in that miserable hour of my betrayal, and had hated and spurned the innocent instrument of my undoing. Now, I approached the idol of the town, a peerless brilliant creature, whom every admirer of genius must needs delight to honour.

My conductor stopped at a little door in a narrow passage, which seemed to me about on a level with the footman's gallery, opened it, and introduced me into a small chamber, where I beheld the Rosalind of the evening, dressed as she had left the stage, and seated before a toilet-table lighted with wax-candles, and carelessly bestrewn with a heterogeneous collection of combs, brushes, rouge-pots, false hair, pomanders and pouncet-boxes, powdering-machines, and masks to be worn during the powdering process, ribbons, fans, laces, feathers, and trinkets of every kind. An honest-faced waiting-woman was folding a brocaded petticoat, while her mistress sat idle, with her face turned towards the door.

She sprang to her feet as I entered the room.

'Oh, Robert,' she cried, 'what happiness to see

you again!—Leave us, Molly; this gentleman is my brother; you can come back in half an hour to dress me.'

The woman dropped a curtsey and vanished, leaving me face to face with the loveliest woman I ever looked upon. Yes, *I* say this,—I, who never loved but one woman, yet could but acknowledge the superior brilliance of this peasant-born beauty to my own pale flower. I loved Dorothea, but from this woman I could not withhold the admiration which is man's natural tribute to perfect beauty.

'My brother,' repeated Margery, with both hands extended to me, as the door closed on the waiting-woman; 'my brother only! oh, for pity's sake, say I am forgiven! I was but an instrument in their hands, Robert, an ignorant country-girl, who believed again and again, and consented to be deluded anew after every fresh deception. On my soul, Robert, I believed it was your wish to marry me, shameful creature as I was! *He* told me so, and I believed him, though he had lied to me a hundred times before.'

'But were you free to marry? Had there been no previous marriage?'

'What! you know of that?' she cried, surprised.

'Of the marriage at the French embassy, yes, Margery.'

'Oh, what a catalogue of infamies I must confess, if I tell you all!' she exclaimed. 'He lured me from my home with the most solemn promises—yes, Robert, the most solemn pledges—that I should be his wife. Nothing but that certainty would have tempted me, for I never loved him as other women love the men to whom they trust their honour. I had not the excuse that others have. I never really loved him, Robert,—and I had loved another.'

This was said in a lower voice, and with infinite tenderness. Then her tone changed to one that expressed only scorn,—scorn of her betrayer, scorn of herself.

'It was my own vanity betrayed me, Robert, aided by his deceitful tongue. His artful compliments set me thinking of my own merits. He made whatever beauty God gave me for a blessing, an instrument for my destruction. He worked upon every weakness of my nature—is the devil himself so perfect in the art of temptation?—until he made me discontented with my peaceful innocent life, and eager to be a lady. And when he had fully succeeded in poisoning my mind thus, he swore, as if

reluctantly, in a kind of desperate passion of love and devotion for me, that, sooner than lose me, he would seal his own ruin in the world by making me his wife. Robert, as I have a soul to be saved, I had resisted every dishonourable proposal. But when he swore this, under circumstances that would have deceived any ignorant creature like me, I believed and trusted him. David Garrick himself is no better actor. I will not pause to tell you the story of my flight. I had scarce reached London when I found myself in the hands of wretches of my own sex, and they, by arts too vile for these lips to describe, compassed my undoing; and then they and he, the arch-deceiver, told me to be happy. They swore there was scarce a lady of quality in the town more honest than I, and asked, derisively, if I wanted to be more innocent than my betters. Mr. Lestrange took me to France, and gave me the seducer's common recompense to his victim, in the shape of trinkets and fine clothes, masquerades and suppers. I was introduced into a world as wicked—I dare venture to declare—as that on which Heaven rained fire and brimstone; and when I was bold enough to declare my hatred of this garish hell, my master told me I was no mate for a gentleman.

Whatever charm he had once seen in me was washed from my face by repentant tears, and he wearied of me in less than a month, then tried to sell me to an elderly libertine of his acquaintance—it was the custom of the country, he said—and finding his slave rebellious, told me I must go back to the home I had abandoned, and that as a reward my folly and peevishness had ill deserved, I should return thither an honest woman, the wife of his led-captain. The marriage was to be only a form. Mr. Hay wanted no wife, but was willing to sell his name for a twenty-pound note. I wanted to go home, Robert; and it would have been something to call myself a wife, and to have a certificate of marriage, so I consented to this shameful proposal, and the ceremony took place. Alas! it availed me nothing; my tormentor was now seized with a fancy for detaining me in his grasp, and I was carried hither and thither at the will of a profligate tyrant. And so I was at last brought to a lodging near Covent Garden, to be again in the power of those female wretches whose tyranny was even worse than his, for it was coarser. If I did not sink to the veriest infamy and become like them, a wretch for hire, I have to thank God, not Everard Lestrange. From this hell upon earth

one way of escape was offered me. I was told that my marriage with Mr. Hay was no marriage, for he had half a dozen wives in as many countries, but that you were willing to marry me—you had been told my true story, and were yet willing. The reprobate Roderick Ainsleigh's son could stoop to a baseness impossible for Mr. Lestrange. *This* is what my destroyer told me. Oh, Robert, forgive me, forgive me! I believed him, and lent myself to his villanous plot. My eyes were opened when you spurned me—still more fully opened when I saw you seized by those ruffians. Then came a pause—a long oblivion of fever and delirium—and I woke in a garret in that thrice-cursed house by Covent Garden, to find myself watched by one poor creature who had always pitied me. She was not an honest woman, but she had what those other harpies had not—a heart. She had been bred among strolling players, had come to London to play small parts in one of the patent theatres, and, being dismissed for incompetency, had fallen into the shameful ways of the wretches with whom I found her. What time she lived with them I know not, but she was no longer young. They were tired of her, she of them; she was the drudge of the house; and knowing my

desire to escape, she offered to depart with me, and to put me in a way of earning my living among her old friends the country players. I thanked and blessed her for the thought; and one night we stole away unquestioned, while the noisy inmates of that place of infamy were carousing. My friend kept her promise. She put me in the way of earning a living—such a living, Robert!—but it was something for so forlorn a creature as I to live honestly. For a long time I was the most mechanical drudge that ever slaved at a master's bidding. But one day I awoke to a sudden pleasure in my art; I, the tragedy-queen of a booth, I heard of Mrs. Yates and Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Woffington and Mrs. Clive; and the thought came to me like an inspiration, that I might win a name like theirs—I, the castaway, might become more famous than the ambassador's son who had flung me into the gutter. With this fancy came a new pleasure in my art; life was changed for me. I no longer brooded on my own miseries. I thought of Juliet's sorrows and Lady Macbeth's ambition, the madness of Constance, the shame of Jane Shore. From that hour, I suppose, I began to be an actress. It was not till two years afterwards that Mr. Garrick saw me, and

brought me to London. Perhaps you know the rest.'

'Yes, Margery, I know that you are now the most famous woman in London, and that the name under which you have won renown is stainless.'

'*That* name, yes, Robert; but not the name of my mother's daughter. There are grand houses open to receive me in London, fine ladies eager to shower favours on me in the caprice of an idle moment; but the cottage in which I was born is shut against me. How shall I repay Sir Everard Lestrange for the misery of my youth, the bitter remorse of my womanhood! Do you think I forgive or forget, Robert, or that I do not hunger for revenge?'

'Leave that to me, Margery. I have a catalogue of wrongs that only blood can blot out; and you have your revenge in this scoundrel's public pursuit of you, which must end in his public mortification.'

'What! you know of that too, Robert? Yes; Everard Lestrange has done his utmost to dishonour the name I now bear, as he dishonoured that which I inherited from my father. You could never imagine the obstinacy of his pursuit—it is an unrelent-

ing persecution. They even tell me he has laid a wager that he will make me his avowed mistress before this year is over. And do you think he loves me, even with the libertine's base passion? No, Robert, *his* passion is a mixture of vanity and malice. I was once his slave, and although he cast me off, he cannot forgive me for having escaped him. The world—*his* world—is pleased to admire me, and to obtain the prize that other men covet he would commit any folly. Yes, this perhaps is a kind of vengeance, but a very poor one.'

'Will you help me to a meeting with this villain, Margery? for I think you alone can do it.'

'And such a meeting would end in blood, eh, Robert?'

'It could scarcely end otherwise. But you need not scruple to grant me this favour, Margery; or if I do not meet him with your help, I shall find other means. I have come fifteen thousand miles to pay my reckoning to Sir Everard Lestrange.'

'Fifteen thousand miles?'

On this I briefly related the story of my exile, to Margery's supreme admiration. The impulsive creature at once exalted me into a hero, and was

ready to attribute the conquest of Bengal to Robert Ainsleigh instead of to Robert Clive.

'And you were in that prison where so many luckless wretches were smothered,' she exclaimed, 'and escaped to win fame and honour!'

'Nay, dear Margery, I have won little honour, but have been handsomely rewarded for doing my duty, and have returned to my native country with a modest fortune, instead of lying yonder in a ditch, where the bones of better men are mouldering. I make no doubt Mr. Lestrange thought he had seen the last of me when he sold me captive to the India Company.'

After this Mrs. Hunter dismissed me, with a hundred apologies, as it was high time she should change her dress and leave the theatre.

'The farce is a short one,' she said, 'and the house will soon be closing. Do not think I am tired of this talk, Robert—I could go on for ever; but folks watch and wonder so about an actress. It is hard to make the world believe one can act Jane Shore and yet be an honest woman.'

She gave me both her hands again, praying that I would call upon her early next day at her lodgings in Surry Street, out of the Strand. And thus we

bade each other good-night, and I went back to my chambers in the Temple, wondering at the events of the evening. Not the least bewildering fact was the complete transformation of my foster-sister, who, from the simplest of rustic maidens, was changed into a perfect woman of the world, passionate, imperious, and most charming.

'I scarce wonder that Sir Everard is bewitched by his cast-off mistress,' I said to myself. 'He little knew what a gem he flung into the gutter. Yet he has a pearl of greater price at home, had he but the soul to appreciate that rarer, purer jewel.'

Before noon next day I was at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings. She was not alone; a tall gentleman, dressed in rusty black, with a wan pallid face and a somewhat nervous manner, was in attendance upon her, and by his conduct on my entrance proclaimed his intention to remain. Mrs. Hunter regarded him with an air of undisguised vexation as she shook hands with me.

'I shall be at the theatre to-morrow morning, Mr. Johnson,' she said, 'and that will be quite soon enough for us to rehearse our scenes. I never yet could rehearse in a room.'

'But I have stage-business in Jaffier that Garrick will do his best to spoil if he sees it at rehearsal,' answered the gloomy stranger, who regarded me with a most sour visage. 'You know how rabidly envious he is of any original touch of art. I should be better satisfied if we rehearsed the scene here. It would not detain you a quarter of an hour.'

'But I have business with this gentleman, my dear Johnson'—here Mr. Johnson favoured me with an evil scowl—'and I know every turn of your head in Jaffier. Sure, we have played the two parts often enough together before Mr. Garrick had seen either of us, and when we were both strollers in a country barn.'

The dismal gentleman groaned aloud. 'Would to Heaven we had never risen from those humble fortunes!' he cried.

'Nay, for pity's sake, dear Johnson, do not be tragical. The sole fault thou hast is, that, not content with acting at night, thou art Hamlet or Othello all day long. I am in no humour for going back to the booths and the rustics, to see my one poor gown smeared with the grease of guttering tallow-candles that no one had time to snuff,—for

sure the candle-snuffer was always wanted to play priest or conspirator in the tragedy, or take the country-folks' money at the doors. No, Johnson, I have no wish to go back.'

'Alas! no, madam, the town has spoiled her who was once the noblest and simplest of women; and you set more value on the empty compliments of rakes and fribbles than on the love of an honest man. But I forget myself. You have business with this gentleman, to whom you have not yet done me the favour to present me.'

Margery shrugged her shoulders with the prettiest air of annoyance.

'Upon my honour, Johnson, you have acquired the art of being disagreeable. This gentleman is my —well, a kinsman—Mr. Ainsleigh by name, newly come home from the Indies, as you may guess by his complexion, which is almost brown enough for Zanga; and I would have you beware how you blab of having seen him, since he does not want all Drury Lane to know of his return.'

'Oh, be sure, madam, I shall be silent for your sake, if not for Mr. Ainsleigh's. Ill as you have treated me, I have still some regard for your reputation.'

'Good heavens, sir!' cried Mrs. Hunter in a rage; 'this is the veriest fooling.'

'There is a kind of fooling, madam, by which honest men's hearts are broken.'

'If the hearts of some folks I know are as soft as their heads, they are stuff that a child could break, sir. But I protest I am tired of this nonsense. My kinsman and I have business matters to talk of, and I must beg you to leave us.'

'As you please, madam,' cried this most tragic of tragedians; 'you order me from your presence, doubtless, in order that you may complete the destruction of a newer victim. Coquetry so cruel is a vice of such enormity that I scarce wonder you have suffered yourself to become the town-talk by Sir Everard Lestrange's open pursuit of you.'

'Have a care, sir!' I cried, with my hand upon my sword; 'you have been told that I have the honour to be this lady's kinsman. You can scarce suppose I shall tamely stand by to see her insulted.'

'Oh, for pity's sake, no quarrelling!' exclaimed Margery, grasping me by the arm. 'Don't you see this Othello thirsts for your blood? Go, Mr. Johnson; Cassio himself was not so innocent as

this gentleman. Go, sir, immediately, if you would ever again be admitted to my presence.'

'Falsest, most cruel of women, I obey!' cried the actor. He paused but an instant to defy me with a tragic scowl, clapped his hat on his head, and flung himself out of the room.

'Mad!' cried Mrs. Hunter; 'madder than Hamlet or Lear, for they at least had cause for their lunacy.'

'And has this poor wretch none?'

'None but a diseased vanity, and a foolish jealousy of one who never favoured his addresses by so much as a look or a word beyond the commonest friendship. Do not set me down as a coquette, Robert, because that man reproaches me. On my honour, he has no right to do so. We acted the leading characters together in those small country theatres where I learned my trade; and there are some men who cannot play Romeo to a decent-looking Juliet half a dozen times without falling over head and ears in love with her. This poor fellow is that kind of foolish, impressionable creature, and we played the lovers for near three years. In all that time he was for ever plaguing me to marry him. He has an unconscionable esti-

mate of his own talents, and sets it down to David Garrick's envy that he has not taken the town by storm ere this. He was engaged to play third-rate characters, but sometimes gets a leading part when our manager is out of humour with the public, or disposed for idleness at Hampton. And this unlucky Mr. Johnson, who will never be better than a Bartholomew-fair ranter, believes it would be the happiest thing for me to become his wife. And he will not accept a simple refusal, though I have told him a hundred times I shall never marry. In plain words, the man is the torment of my life. He dogs my footsteps at every turn, and if he were not altogether too ridiculous a creature, would be a most serious trouble to me.'

'Let me be the champion to rid you of this foolish persecutor, as well as of another, more vicious than foolish.'

'No, Robert, not for worlds would I have you harm a hair of that simple creature's head. You do not know what a heart he has in spite of his follies.'

We talked long. I told Margery all that happened in India between Philip Hay and myself, and handed her the certificate of that marriage in Paris

which gave her a name that, if obscure, was at least legally her own. I urged upon her that she should go to her father, trusting fully in the strength of his love, and the influence of her beauty and success, which must needs make that honest fellow proud of his kindred with a woman whose genius had made her famous.

She shook her head sadly. 'I doubt whether he would think much of that, Robin,' she said. His only notion of an actress is taken from the painted trolls he has seen outside the booths at Warborough fair, and he would esteem it a sorry distinction that I should have won honour and riches by such a trade.'

'I will bring him up to London, Margery, and show you to him—take him into the pit unawares, as I went myself, and let him see you in the blaze of your beauty. 'Twould go hard but that melted him.'

Mistress Hunter blushed and sparkled at this.

'Thou hast the happiest fancy, Robin,' she answered. 'If he saw me play Juliet I think it might touch him. Or perhaps the Grecian daughter would be most melting. Or in Jane Shore he would see that a woman who has sinned may yet have a conscience.'

'There shall be no hint of sin, my dear. He shall see thee as Juliet, and be warned by thy tragical end against the hard-heartedness of fathers.'

It was marvellous how Margery brightened at this notion. She had the true artist's love of her art, and the idea of acting before her father, and by her fictitious woes winning him to compassionate her real misfortunes, enchanted her. I left her in the gayest spirits, and full of gratitude for what she was pleased to call my goodness.

'Heaven has given you to me for my brother and defender, dear friend,' she said at parting; and there was a frankness in her looks and tones that told me she was now my friend only:—that the girlish fancy which had grown up out of our childish association was a fancy of the past.

CHAPTER II.

I FIND THAT I AM NOT FORGOTTEN.

As the porter had told me that Sir Everard and his lady were to return to London immediately, I now began to consider the best means of approaching the scoundrel, whose chastisement was the chief business that had brought me back to England. That Lady Barbara had made a will in my favour, and that Everard Lestrange had suppressed it, was a notion that had taken root in my mind; but reflection only served to convince me more fully of the uselessness of any attempt to bring this fact to light. The man who drew up the will was in his grave—the will itself had been doubtless reduced long ago to a little heap of gray ashes which a breath might disperse. More idle than the dream of an idiot was any thought of what my benefactress might have intended, or the heritage I might have lost.

I resigned myself, therefore, to the conviction that I had been cheated, and was without hope of redress. Even if it were possible for ingenuity to discover evidence of the wrong that had been done me, I had not the cast of mind which could adapt itself to so slow a process, or follow a villain through all the narrow crooked ways of his villainy to the broad light of day. Nor was the wealth I had perchance been robbed of a boon so precious in my estimation. I had seen in that melancholy instance of Omichund to what a degraded condition the accursed hunger of gold may reduce a man, and I could believe that my generous benefactress had bequeathed me the bulk of her fortune, and let the prize slip with scarce a sigh. No—it was not because he had cheated me of this world's wealth that I hated Everard Lestrange, but because he had stolen the woman I loved.

While I brooded over the speediest means of securing a meeting with him, I was sorely puzzled to find a friend who would carry a challenge for me, without running the hazard of being kicked out of doors by my fine gentleman. Had I been in Calcutta I could have pitched upon half a dozen gentlemen willing to do me the service, but in this vast

city I stood alone, and knew not where to turn for a serviceable acquaintance who could help me through the formalities of a gentlemanlike quarrel. This necessity took me daily to the coffee-house, where I might perchance pick up an acquaintance of sufficient standing to serve my turn. I breakfasted at one house, dined at another, and spent my evenings at a third, and looked about me for the kind of man in whom I might safely confide my private business, and whose friendship might be worth cultivating. I knew that many a life-long alliance had begun with a remark on the ministry, or the handing of a newspaper, and that it needs not a formal letter of introduction to cement an acquaintance between honest men. I was still young, but I had seen the world, and had too much experience to be trapped a second time by a man of Philip Hay's stamp.

I walked in St. James's Square after nightfall now, just as I had walked in those hopeless days, years ago. I saw the house lighted as of old, and was on one occasion just in time to see a carriage drive away from the door, which I conjectured to contain her whose face it would have been rapture for me to look upon. Yet I made no open attempt

to see Lady Lestrange. Eager as I was to justify myself to her, I was still more eager to revenge myself upon her husband. When that was done, that old score blotted out, I would tell her my story. She might be so well drilled as to repulse me with incredulity and contempt; but she might listen and believe, and in that case my task would have been accomplished, and I should go back to India leaving behind me not one link to attach me to my native country.

But what a fool is he who plans his life as precisely as your Dutch gardener cuts out the geometrical beds in his garden! Nothing came to pass as I had forecast it.

It so happened that, whilst I was choosing the messenger to carry my challenge, chance threw me across the pathway of Lady Lestrange. I was idling away an empty afternoon near the entrance to the ring in Hyde Park, wondering at the splendour and variety of the equipages, without any pleasure in their magnificence or interest in their owners, when I saw an open chariot coming towards me, in which there sat a solitary lady with a dog in her lap—one of those coffee-coloured pugs I had been so familiar with in my Lady Barbara's dressing-room. I could have

fancied it was Basto, or Spadillio himself—the very creature I had fondled many a time out of sheer idleness in that brief summer-tide of my life.

The lady was Dora—changed, and yet strangely the same. Lovelier and more brilliant than I remembered her, but with enough of the old expression to set my heart beating like a whitesmith's hammer, and to cloud my eyes with a mist that was more passionate than tears.

She was smiling on her friends as she rode towards me, radiant and beaming. Heavens, she is happy, then! I said to myself, with ineffable bitterness. She is happy—your true woman of fashion, who thinks more of the liveries of her footmen and the price of her horses than of a husband's character. What is a husband made for, in such a world as this, except to pay a milliner's bill with civility—and keep his distance? And is this the girl who melted in my arms at Vauxhall that night, and would have trusted a penniless adventurer with her heart and fortune?

I had but a short time for such unworthy doubts. In the next minute I saw the sweet face change—the delicate bloom fade into a sickly pallor—and I knew that I was recognized.

Nor had I any reason to complain of my angel's coldness. She half stood up in her carriage, and bade her coachman stop his horses with a peremptory suddenness that somewhat startled the fellow. He drew up close to the path on which I stood, indifferent as to what inconvenience he might occasion to the vehicles that followed him.

She leant out of her carriage to speak to me.

'Mr. Ainsleigh!' she exclaimed. 'Yes, I knew you at a glance, although you are so much altered. In England, and not come near me!'

This with the sweetest air of reproach, and a look that thrilled my soul.

'Nay, madam,' I said, with a calmness that cost me no small effort, 'I did not know how I might be received. You have been, doubtless, taught to think me a scoundrel.'

Her brow clouded, and grew almost stern as she answered me.

'Yes, sir, I have been deceived, and undeceived again. My woman, Adolphine, died not long ago of a putrid fever. I nursed her, poor sinful creature, and on her death-bed she told me what had been done to you—the Fleet marriage—everything. If there had been anything needed to widen the

distance between Sir Everard Lestrange and me, that discovery would have done it. But we had long been strangers.'

All this in so low a voice that the loungers and passers-by had no reason to suspect our conversation was in any way out of the common. There was a hum and buzz of many voices, the sound of wheels, all the stir and bustle of a crowd. We were almost as much alone as in a wilderness.

Oh, with what a wicked joy was I inspired by this confession! They had long been strangers—nothing could widen the breach between them. That villain had stolen my darling from me, but had never been master of her heart.

'Yet you bear his name, Dora,' I said, 'and the town gives you credit for being happy.'

'Would you have me parade my miseries before an unfeeling town?' she asked,—'to have my domestic sorrow set in a ballad, perhaps. No, Mr. Ainsleigh, I glory in hiding the smart. I live in the midst of crowds, and wherever pleasure is to be sold, I am among the buyers.'

And then, struck, perchance, by my reproachful look, she added,—

'But for this, Robert, I should have died long

ago of a broken heart. We women have a knack of shutting our minds against thought.'

'Yet I doubt if a round of frivolous pleasures can afford happiness to that Dora whom I knew at Hauteville,' I said.

'Happiness!' she cried, with a little laugh that was all bitterness; 'I have forgotten the very flavour of that. The Dora whom you knew at Hauteville is dead—buried; buried with all her hopes and dreams. But let us drop this foolish, sentimental talk! Tell me how you have prospered—thank God, you *have* prospered, I see—and what chance brought you back to England.'

'I have business here,' I replied gravely.

'Your own, or another's?'

'My own.'

She gave me a penetrating look, as if she half suspected my design.

'Are you afraid to trust an old friend with your affairs?' she asked.

'Nay, dear lady, there is no one in whom I would sooner confide than yourself,' I answered, somewhat evasively, 'if the affair were one which I was free to communicate; but it is not, and in some measure involves another than myself.'

'Oh! And yet a moment ago you said it was your own business.'

'My own and another's. There are few things in which a man may stand or fall by himself. If the issue is—as I hope, you shall be the first to hear of it.'

'I suppose I must be content with that,' she answered reluctantly; 'but there is something in your manner that disquiets me.'

Tempted by the sweetness of her manner, forgetful of everything except how much I loved her, I ventured to ask whether I might not see her again shortly at her own house, since it was impossible we could talk long in that crowded place.

She shook her head sadly.

'Dear Mr. Ainsleigh, that cannot be,' she said gravely. 'It is a great happiness to me to see you again in England, a prosperous man; safely delivered from the wicked snare that was set for you. But Sir Everard Lestrange is doubtless still your enemy, and your coming to St. James's Square might occasion mischief to all of us. In this world we must needs be strangers.'

'Strangers! What, Dora, is there no such thing as friendship?'

'Not for me. I have no friends—not even among my own sex. The secrets of my unhappy life are too sad to be told, and there can be no friendship where there is no confidence. I must live and die alone, Mr. Ainsleigh.'

'You called me Robert, just now,' I said; 'oh! why will you not trust me, Dora? I will be the faithfullest friend that ever a woman had, and will forget that I have ever been your lover—will school my heart to a worship so reverential, that you will have no excuse for avoiding me.'

'No, Robert—I will call you by the old name, since you prefer it—no, Robert, believe me, it is best we should be strangers. Any encounter between my husband and you must needs lead to ill consequences; and since he is my husband, I am bound to respect him.'

'Respect!' I cried impatiently; 'why not rather seek a release from a man whose conduct is an open insult to your goodness?'

'What release, Robert? There is none but death can deliver me. I do not believe in a divorce, even were it possible for me to obtain one, which I much doubt. No, Robert, I confess that the tie is hateful; but in an unlucky hour of weakness I con-

sented to oblige my guardian by the sacrifice of my own inclination, and I must abide the consequences of my folly.'

'Oh, Dora, that you had but known Everard Lestrange's real character!'

'That was too carefully hidden from me. Even my dear aunt helped to deceive me, or at least suffered me to be deceived.'

'I was persuaded that he was breaking his heart for me—that you had been false from the very first, and had only courted my fortune. Forgive me, Robert, for that fatal credulity. It has cost me very dear.'

'It has cost me all the happiness of life,' I answered bitterly. What more could I say? The briefest reflection told me she was right. Between us two there could be no such thing as friendship. It was a mere juggling with conscience to pretend it. That fond and passionate love for her which had smouldered so long in my heart burst into flame at sight of her, and I knew that I loved her as madly to-day as I had loved her that night at Vauxhall when she first permitted me to hope.

'Let us bid each other good-bye, Robert,' she said softly, offering me her hand, which I pressed

to my lips. 'My husband walks here every afternoon, and I should not care for him to surprise us talking to each other.'

Nor did I wish that my first encounter with Everard Lestrange should take place in the presence of his wife. I had that to say to him which could not be said before her. So I submitted to bid her good-bye, and to see the chariot drive onward with its fair mistress, who looked, methought, more beautiful than a princess in a fairy tale, as she bowed and smiled upon her friends, kissing her hand to one, and recognizing another with a little wave of her fan, with the air of never having known a sorrow in her life. Women have surely a genius for that species of dissimulation. If a man is angry or sorrowful he will walk through the crowd with a moody brow, and scowl upon every creature he meets; but let a woman but know herself observed, the desire to be pleasing and beautiful will override every other feeling.

I was now resolved that there should be no more time wasted in deliberation. I had been in England nearly a month and nothing done, but after this meeting with Dora Lestrange I was seized with an impatience that would brook no delay. The cry

of my soul was like Othello's, 'Blood, Iago, blood!'

I knew that she still loved me. How far I might have been governed by that precious security I can hardly tell, but I know that the thought did influence me. Beyond the bloody vision of a duel with that traitor there rose the star of hope. If he were slain and Dora set free! Yet at this point my sanguine fancies were suddenly put to flight. Would she, the most delicate and high-minded of women, accept a hand stained with her husband's blood? Base and false as he might have been, she would not the less abhor the act that freed her from him.

That which to my mind meant retribution, to hers would seem murder. Hope was barred this way, and the prospect gloomy. But my wrong was too deep for the possibility of forgiveness. Even at the hazard of losing Dora's esteem for ever, I must call Everard Lestrange to account for his treachery.

The one solitary acquaintance I had by this time found in my favourite coffee-house—where I met many men who were good enough company for an idle hour, but few whom I could willingly have trusted with my confidence—was Mr. Thomas

Briggs, a young naval officer, a daring open-hearted fellow, who had the very freshness and perfume of the sea about him, I fancied, and of whose honesty and truth I never entertained a doubt.

Our first acquaintance arose one night when I had lingered at a coffee-house in Covent Garden later than usual, brooding upon my troubles over a solitary pint of wine, and with an unread newspaper before me. 'Twas close upon eleven o'clock, and the room almost empty, when the lieutenant, or the captain—as the head-waiter, a great personage in his way, was wont to call Mr. Briggs—came in fresh from Drury Lane Theatre, protesting, for the public ear of our shrunken assembly, in a sort of general appeal to the room, that there never before had lived so lovely and accomplished a creature as Mrs. Hunter, whom he had just seen acting Cordelia to Garrick's Lear.

'Twas afflicted innocence and filial piety to the very life!' he exclaimed; 'there was not a smack of sawdust or lamp-oil in the whole performance. The pit was crying like a child; and if there was a dry eye in the house during that melting last scene between the old king and his daughter, I would not give much for the heart of the man who owned it."

I was pleased by this hearty praise of my foster-sister, and still better pleased by the manner of the speaker, which had a frankness and vivacity that were actually refreshing after the affected supercilious air of those town-bred fine gentlemen I had grown familiar with, who seemed every one to speak and think alike—as if there were a general and prescribed model upon which every man moulded himself. I made room for Mr. Briggs beside me.

'The lady is a friend—almost a relative of mine,' I said, 'and it is very pleasant to me to hear her so warmly applauded.'

'Nay, sir, you are under no obligation to me for doing what all the town does,' he answered, taking the chair beside me.

'Perhaps not, sir, but there is a heartiness in your tone which makes your praise better worth having than the cool criticism of those fine gentlemen who seem to think more of their own cleverness in discriminating than the genius of the lady they admire, and who appear to consider they do her an honour by acknowledging her merits.'

On this we grew wondrous friendly, drank our wine together, and sat talking of Margery till the house

closed. Mr. Briggs was warmly interested when I told him this bright creature was my foster-sister, and that she had been reared in a gamekeeper's cottage. He admired her all the more on discovering her humble origin, but was eager to know her present position, and whether there was any such person as Mr. Hunter.

'No,' I answered; 'the name of Hunter is an assumed one. The lady is the widow of a gentleman called Hay, who died not very long ago in the service of the East India Company. He was by no means a good husband, and Margery has supported herself ever since her marriage.'

'Noble soul!' cried the lieutenant. 'Would to Heaven I had the honour of her acquaintance! She is a being I could worship.'

I smiled at his enthusiasm, which I believed to be honest.

'Mrs. Hunter has a little too much of the worship of her admirers,' I said, 'and prefers to live retired. It is not to many men I would speak as freely of her as I have spoken to you; but I have a notion you may be trusted.'

'Egad! sir, you are right. I would go through fire and water for that woman; ay, and ask no

higher reward than the knowledge that I had done her a service.'

We met at the same coffee-house several evenings after this, and the acquaintance thus begun ripened into something which I ventured to believe was friendship. Mr. Briggs communicated his affairs to me in a very free spirit. He was the second son of a Devonshire squire, with a small estate and a largish family—had been put in the navy when a boy—had fought under Keppel at Goree, and lived in hopes of speedily getting his rank as commander.

He was, like myself, an idler upon town, having a month's leave while his ship was under repair.

In return for his confidence, which extended to the smallest details of his life, I told him my own story, suppressing only that part which related to my marriage, and concerned Margery. It was enough for my purpose that he should know Mr. Lestrange had betrayed me into the hands of the East India Company's crimps, and sold me into slavery. That was sufficient ground for our quarrel. I had now made up my mind to employ Mr. Briggs as my friend in this matter. His position as an officer in His Majesty's navy raised him above the insolence of Sir Everard Lestrange—or at least I

thought so, not knowing even yet how far that gentleman was capable of pushing his audacity.

The generous fellow fired at once on hearing of my wrongs.

'What! he sold you to those scoundrelly crimps in order to steal your mistress?' he exclaimed. 'Was there ever a viler business! I will carry your message to him to-morrow morning—and, egad! if he refuses to fight you, he shall fight me.'

'He will hardly dare refuse,' I said.

But the issue proved that Sir Everard dared to be as insolent as he was treacherous.

Mr. Briggs went to White's Club-house three days after my interview with Dora, and waited in the strangers' room for Sir Everard, who came to him after upwards of an hour.

He stated his business in the briefest words, and he told me that, practised dissembler as Lestrange evidently was, he started and whitened to the lips at the news of my return.

'What!' he cried, 'did not that carrion perish with the rest in the Black Hole? Mongrels have long lives, it seems.'

'Mr. Ainsleigh is no mongrel,' my friend answered, stoutly, 'but the lawful son of his father,

Roderick Ainsleigh, who is still living, and whom he had the good fortune to meet in Bengal.'

'Sir, I congratulate you upon your skill as a romancer — an invention which Mr. Richardson might envy,' this gentleman replied, with a sneer. 'The Roderick Ainsleigh with whose name you seem so familiar was killed in a tavern brawl—the natural doom of a drunkard and bully—six-and-twenty years ago.'

'You are mistaken, sir,' said Mr. Briggs; 'but that matters very little. I am here on the part of Mr. Robert Ainsleigh, his son, now an ensign in the East India Company's service.'

'And pray, sir, what has Mr. Robert Ainsleigh to solicit of me?'

'He has nothing to solicit, but something to demand,' replied my friend. 'There are some quarrels that will keep a long time. Mr. Ainsleigh's quarrel with you is no whit the cooler than when he was forced out of the country, without the power to avenge himself.'

'I have no quarrel with Mr. Ainsleigh, sir. Eagles do not eat flies. I only quarrel with men of my own rank.'

'I will not dispute your own measure of your

importance, sir, which may elevate you to a level with princes, for anything I know. But, waiving all the claims of birth, Mr. Ainsleigh is an officer in the East India Company's service, and a worthy antagonist. I must beg you to give him an immediate opportunity of settling the little matter between you.'

'And I repeat, sir, that there is no matter between us. I no more recognize Mr. Ainsleigh's right to challenge me than I should that of my French cook to demand satisfaction for a word or two of abuse on the score of an ill-dressed dinner. I doubt, sir, you are espousing a cause of which you know very little. This person had plotted to rob me of my affianced wife—for the sake of her fortune, mark you!—being all the while the sworn lover of a country wench, his foster-sister; and in order to circumvent him, I had recourse to a recruiting sergeant in the Company's service, who was willing to put this trickster in the way of earning an honest living. That is my crime, Mr. Briggs; nor shall I blush to avow it to the world, if need be. But as for crossing swords with this adventurer, who has escaped a gallows, while better men swing daily at Tyburn, I say again, I would as soon fight one of my lacqueys!'

On this Mr. Briggs grew warm, swore that Sir Everard should be forced to give me a speedy meeting, and challenged him on his own account, for a want of civility to himself—a challenge the gentleman found it impossible to refuse. So my friend called upon an acquaintance on his way back to the tavern where he had left me waiting the result of his mission, and despatched him straight to White's to settle a speedy meeting with Sir Everard.

'I shall have to put some insult on him in public,' I cried indignantly, when Mr. Briggs had related the foregoing conversation. 'As for your fighting with him, my dear fellow, that is a mere folly. He is no doubt better at the small sword than you; he will have the choice of weapons, and may run you through the lungs.'

The lieutenant told me what Sir Everard had said of my foster-sister; but this I put aside as the baseless slander of a scoundrel, and Mr. Briggs was fully satisfied with my denial. I was glad to find there had been no mention of the Fleet marriage, since it would have been difficult for me to explain that transaction without discredit to Margery.

CHAPTER III.

I OBTAIN SATISFACTION.

I WAS now secretly determined to stand no longer on punctilio; but to force an encounter with my enemy. Delay had not lessened, but increased, my desire for revenge. That passion had burned, a constant flame, in all those years of exile. Let me but rid the world of this villain, release Dora from her hateful ties, and I cared little what became of my worthless life, or in what Indian ditch I found my last resting-place.

Release Dora! ay, even though I set her at liberty to bless another with that love which I dared not hope could be mine. Should fortune favour my just cause, and I survive the meeting I was bent upon bringing about, I should be every whit as much cut off from all chance of gaining my angel, as in the event of my death.

I went home, and wrote a long letter to Dora—

there was a kind of bitter sweetness even in holding this converse with her—a letter explaining my motives, and justifying my actions. This I put up in a sealed cover, addressed to my friend George Briggs, the enclosure to be delivered only if I fell.

Having done this, I went out into the streets, as yet not quite resolved as to what I should do, but with a savage determination to meet Everard Lestrange, face to face, before the day was ended.

I walked westward, and before I had gone far decided on proceeding straight to St. James's Square, there to ascertain where my gentleman might be found. It was not in his own house that I cared to encounter him. I shrank from the idea of a deadly quarrel beneath that roof which sheltered Dora, and I knew not to what lengths passion might carry me when I looked on the hated countenance of the traitor who had undone me. My desire was to meet him in public, and, if need were, put such open insult upon him, that the necessity of wiping out his own injury would oblige him to give me satisfaction for mine.

My knowledge of Sir Everard's habits led me to suppose there would be little hazard of my finding him at home at this time of the day, and the

result proved my conjecture just. The porter informed me that his master was rarely to be found in his house after breakfast—a meal which he took alone in his dressing-room at any hour before midday. This afternoon he had left word that he should go straight from his club to the House of Commons, where Mr. Pitt was expected to speak. I went down to the door of the House, and there discovered, from the general aspect of the scene, that the question of the day had not yet begun. There was a sprinkling of gossips and starers about the doors waiting to see the ministers—an assembly which grew more numerous as I waited, but which was so slender when I arrived as to allow of my posting myself close against the entrance to the House.

I had provided myself with a short leathern horsewhip before leaving my chambers, but made no parade of this weapon, which I carried inside my coat. Armed thus, I waited for my enemy, lending but an indifferent ear to the gossip of the bystanders, every one of whom affected to be an oracle to his neighbour, and laid down the law with an air of indisputable authority.

The House was filling rapidly. The senators passed me in rapid succession, sometimes single,

sometimes in little groups of two and three, eagerly discussing the business of the afternoon. Now and then a person of public distinction was received with some slight spontaneous acclamation, and bowed civilly, or smiled his gratitude, in acknowledgment of the compliment. I had stood thus waiting and watching for upwards of an hour, and began to think that every member of the House must have passed me by, and to surmise that the person I watched for had gone in before I arrived, when I at last beheld the traitor approaching between two gentlemen, one of whom was elderly, of a military aspect and somewhat dissolute air, the other a fopling, scarce emerged from boyhood.

The crowd had lessened after the passing of Pitt and his colleagues, and there now remained only a few stragglers, who waited, I imagine, rather from the lack of anything better to do with themselves than from any warm interest in the scene.

'Don't forget our little supper after the opera, Lestrange,' said the fopling, as the three men paused a few paces from where I stood, and seemed about to part company. 'Sure, you'll not waste so pleasant an evening in yonder Temple of dulness!

Lady Millicent is to be one of us, and you know she swears existence is scarce worth having, in the shape of a supper-party, that is to say, without Sir Everard Lestrange.'

'Lady Millicent is vastly civil; but civilities from a woman on the wrong side of thirty, who owes her figure to her mantua-maker, and her complexion to a liberal use of white-lead, are hardly in my way,' said Sir Everard, in the slow, sneering tones that recalled all my old feelings of aversion. 'However, if you really want me, I'll come. Out of sheer good-nature towards you, Pynsent, upon my honour.'

He said this loud enough to be heard by the bystanders, and was evidently gratified by the suppressed titter that rewarded his humour. As he turned to survey the populace with a languid grin, his eyes met mine, and his face changed in an instant from its affected smile to a look of ferocity that was not unmingled with alarm.

His hand went to his sword-hilt involuntarily, but before he could draw the weapon, which I believe he would have done in an instinctive movement of self-defence, I had seized him by the cravat with my left hand, and stood so close against him,

face to face, that he had no liberty for his sword-arm.

I had left mine free, however, and snatching the horsewhip from my breast, I held it firmly grasped, and in a convenient position for laying on the lash.

'Look you here, Sir Everard Lestrange,' I said, 'I have come here prepared to give you the beating you deserve; but as you bear the name of a lady I honour, I don't mean to horsewhip you unless you force me to it. I sent you a challenge this morning, which you declined. I invite you this evening to meet me like a man, or submit to be beaten like a dog.'

The military gentleman gripped me by the arm, and tried to drag me off his friend, with a volley of abuse, but I was the stronger of the two, and held my foe firmly by the throat.

The fopling stood and stared with a glass in his eye, useless as Lot's wife after her unlucky transformation.

'Constables!' cried the officer; 'Great Heaven! where are the constables? And then in a general appeal to the bystanders, 'Will you see a gentleman strangled?'

There was a movement among the crowd, and an official of some kind who had been guarding the door came towards me.

I sent the lash swirling through the air, and brought it down upon the scoundrel's shoulders with so hearty an application that the oath with which he greeted the blow was more like a scream of pain.

'Will you meet me now, Everard Lestrange?' I asked, 'or will you give me in charge to the constabulary, like the craven cur I believe you are, because you are afraid to cross swords with the man whom you cheated out of his wife, and then sold to the East India House crimps?'

'Do you hear this fellow, Blagrove?' exclaimed Lestrange. 'What say you—shall I give him in custody for assault, or leave you to settle the matter for me? 'Tis a base-born dog for a gentleman to fight.'

This was in an undertone to his friend, the soldier.

'Give him in charge!' shrieked the fopling; 'give the ruffian in charge!'

The official laid his paw on my shoulder, and tried to wrench the whip from my hand; but I shook

myself free from his grasp, and he stood at my elbow waiting for instructions.

'In my opinion, there is but one way of settling the business,' answered Major Blagrove.

'You may let the fellow go,' said Sir Everard. 'I have a longish score to settle with him, and can find my own manner of payment. Step this way, sir,' he said to me, with his haughtiest air, and then walked away from the bystanders, his friends and I following. We halted at a quiet corner, four or five hundred yards from the House of Commons.

'Now, sir,' said Lestrange, 'I am at your service.' And then turning to the Major, he went on coolly,—'It was a mere scruple of honour that withheld me from fighting him. You know I am no tyro in the use of pistol or small-sword, and one fellow the more sent untimely to Limbo, is no such heavy burden on my conscience. Hark ye, sir, I have agreed to meet your friend the sailor on Wimbledon Common at daybreak to-morrow — the sun rises about six, doesn't he, Major?—and I have no objection to try my hand on you when I have done with him. Shall we have pistols or small-swords, Blagrove? We had best settle the preliminaries at once. There is no occasion for punctilio in this case.'

The last words were spoken with as contemptuous a tone as he could command.

'Small-swords, by all means,' replied the Major, with a heartiness which smacked of actual enjoyment. 'Where am I to find your friend, sir?'

'At the "King's Head" in Covent Garden, from eight o'clock this evening,' I answered.

'Is it the sailor you sent to me this morning?' asked Lestrange.

'The same, sir.'

'And if I happen to run him through in the first affair, sir, who is to be your second?'

'In that case I can fight without one,' I replied; 'but I have a notion that Providence will hardly permit so worthy a life as that of Lieutenant Briggs to be sacrificed, while Sir Everard Lestrange goes unscathed.'

'The ways of Providence are somewhat like a deal of cards, sir,' said Lestrange, with a cynical laugh; 'and it is not always the best man whose hand holds most trumps. Until to-morrow morning, sir, I have the honour to be your very obedient servant. Come, Major, we may as well hear the debate.' He lifted his hat with an ironical courtesy, and walked away with his friend. The

fopling loitered behind, staring at me as if, from the fact of having engaged to fight Sir Everard Lestrange, I had become a natural curiosity.

'If you have anything to bequeath, my friend,' he drawled at last, 'you had best go home and make your will. 'Twill not be the first time Lestrange has killed his man, if he leaves you carrion to-morrow morning.'

'I thank you, sir, for your advice, and shall hold myself equal to either fortune.'

I took my way to the tavern where I had first seen Mr. Briggs, and at which he and I had met habitually since our first encounter. I was in excellent spirits. The possibilities of the next morning gave me not the least uneasiness. Fortune had been very hard upon me, and I held my life as a possession so worthless, that I did not even take the trouble to consider the hazard of its coming to a sudden end within a dozen hours.

I had tasted revenge. Let Everard Lestrange carry off the matter as lightly as he might, the sting of my lash still tingled upon his shoulders, and the smart of the public affront that I had put upon him would stick to him when that sting was forgotten. No words can describe the savage

joy which possessed me in that one exquisite moment when I struck the blow; it had needed as much resolution as I could command not to make the most of my opportunity, and thrash him soundly. But knowing myself his superior in strength and bulk, as I was above him in height, I had put a check upon the inclination to inflict so brutal a chastisement. I only wanted to provoke him into fighting me. Yet so sweet had been that one brief sensation, that I was fain to confess that some element of the savage remains in a man in spite of his civilization. 'Tis only superficial polish after all, this system of education and manners which has grown up out of seventeen centuries of Christianity, and the fine gentleman in point lace ruffles needs but to be angry to develop as fierce a spirit as ever burned in the breasts of those forefathers of ours who stained themselves with woad, and worshipped in the mystic circle of Stonehenge.

I found my friend at the tavern, drinking a bowl of punch with Captain Crucknell, the gentleman who was to be his second next morning. I told him what had happened, and left him to receive Major Blagrove, and to make all arrangements for me.

'Are you good at the small-sword?' he asked anxiously. I had not handled a rapier half a dozen times in my life, but I took care not to tell him as much.

'I have no anxiety about my share of to-morrow's work,' I answered lightly; 'I am only sorry that you have involved yourself in an unnecessary quarrel.'

'Unnecessary quarrel! Why, the fellow treated me as if I had been the scum of the earth. I only hope I shall spoil his sword-arm for the next twelve-months. The first mate and I used to have a fencing match every morning, on board the *Cadmus*, and I am not so bad a swordsman as you may think, Mr. Ainsleigh!'

I had very little doubt that he was a better man than I, but kept my own counsel, and left him to his company and his punch, after he had promised to look in upon me in Brick Court the last thing at night, to let me know his plans for the next morning.

I went straight to my chambers, and devoted the remaining hours of my evening in arranging and destroying a few private papers, and writing two more letters—the first to my generous friend Mr. Holwell, and the second to Mr. Swinfen, both con-

taining some kind of justification of my conduct. I then drew up a brief form of will, in which I bequeathed all I possessed to my faithful friend John Hawker.

This I kept open till Mr. Briggs came, when I signed it in the presence of himself and a neighbour, who signed it after me as witnesses.

This document being duly signed and attested, and my neighbour retired to his own rooms, whence I had fetched him to do me this service, I placed it with the two letters I had just written, and the letter to Dora, written that morning, in a cover, which I carefully sealed and addressed to Mr. Swinfen. Below the address I wrote these words—'To be delivered in the event of any misfortune happening to Robert Ainsleigh;' and this being done, I felt that my worldly affairs were settled.

'If Lestrange kills me—as I cannot doubt he will try to do—you will see that this packet is delivered—won't you, Briggs?' I asked.

'But don't you think he's just as likely to give *me* my quietus?' said my friend.

'No; I look upon your duel as an idle ceremony. Scoundrel as he is, he can't bear no grudge against you—and as a man of the world, he would hardly

embarrass himself by an unnecessary homicide—a murder which could have no flavour in it, since he cannot possibly hate you!'

I put the packet in my desk, which was always left open, and where my friend, or any one else, would easily find it.

Mr. Briggs slept at my chambers that night, on a mattress which I spread for him before the fire. It was the end of April, but chilly weather, and there was a drizzling rain falling when we left the Temple next morning, before it was light. Captain Crucknell called for us at five o'clock, and we all three set out together. Never had I seen a drearier daybreak—the streets were sloppy, the sky low and gray, the smoke of newly kindled fires beaten down by the dampness of the atmosphere, the barges on the river scarce distinguishable through the thick leaden-coloured mist.

Sunrise there was none—the dark gray of the sky changed to a somewhat lighter gray, and that was all. Yet I was in no way depressed by the gloom of the weather. Never since my return from India had my spirits been so light—never since the great day of Plassey had I felt so agreeable an excitement.

We found a hackney-coach near Blackfriars

Bridge, and bade the man drive us as fast as his horses would go to the windmill on Wimbledon Common. He brightened at the order, and I believe he smoked our business, and was elated by the prospect of a liberal fee.

The drive was a long one. My friend Briggs, who was in a very lively humour, gave me some sage advice about the management of my weapon.

'He will make a feint in carte, and then disengage quickly, and try to pierce you with a downward thrust in tierce, very like,' he said; 'it was a rare trick of that rascal, the first mate. But don't you let go his eye. Whatever he is going to do, be sure you'll see it in his eye.'

With this, and much more counsel of the same kind, Mr. Briggs and his friend Captain Crucknell favoured me as we drove along the sunny lanes—past the villages of Wandsworth and Putney, and up the hill towards Wimbledon. I heard, yet heard them not, for my mind was employed in that strange panoramic survey of all my past life which is said to be exhibited to the mental vision of a drowning man in the few moments of his death-agony. The Warrener's lodge—the library at Hauteville—the fort at Calcutta—the domes and minarets of Muxadavad

—all the places and persons that had figured in the story of my life drifted backward and forward across my brain like the changing shadows from a magic lantern, and all this time my good friend Briggs and the worthy Captain of the *Cadmus* went prosing on about carte and tierce.

The day was lighter, but not much brighter, when we arrived at our destination—a kind of grassy platform on the highest part of the common, where there was a windmill, which seemed to have fallen into disuse. We left the coach a few yards from this windmill, and I gave the driver a guinea, and bade him wait for us at a turn in the road which I pointed out to him; where he would be handy when we wanted him, and yet too far off to observe our movements. I had, however, very little doubt that he knew the nature of our business, as this locality was notorious for such meetings; and it was as much the right thing to fight at Wimbledon, as to drink at the 'Cocoa-tree,' or gamble at Newmarket.

The fine straight rain was still falling, but the day was mild, and there was a perfume of spring in the atmosphere. The furze was in bloom here and there, the blackthorn in full flower, the hawthorn-

bushes bursting into leaf; and, for the first time since my coming back to England, I heard the skylark. It is impossible for me to say how keenly that shrill sweet song moved me. It was at Hauteville I had last listened to it. We were the first upon the ground, but we had not long to wait. A light curricle came spinning along the high road, and stopped a little way from where we alighted. Sir Everard, who had been driving himself, flung the reins to his groom, paused for a minute as if to give the man some instruction, and then came slowly across the grass towards us with Major Blagrove at his side.

He honoured my companion with a little insolent bow, which was more contemptuous than no salute at all: myself he altogether ignored. He drew off his gloves, took off his coat, and prepared himself for the first encounter with the utmost deliberation, and a lazy air, as of a man half-awakened. After his sword had been duly measured and handed to him even, he stopped to indulge himself with a yawn.

'Now, Mr. Briggs,' said the Major; and in the next moment I heard the sharp clash of steel, and knew that the business had begun. I had mounted

a little hillock a few paces from the combatants, and stood looking down at them.

Alas, for my poor friend's fine theories about carte and tierce! Alas, for the experience derived from daily exercise with the first mate of the *Cadmus!* A glance told me that he was the merest child in the hands of his antagonist. That firm wrist, that easy attitude, bespoke Sir Everard Lestrange an accomplished swordsman. I remembered his giving me a fencing lesson one morning in the hall at Hauteville, and laughing at my clumsiness, in those early days of our acquaintance when he affected a friendly feeling for me. How angry I felt with myself for not having taken the pains to make myself a master of this useful accomplishment!

The issue did not long remain doubtful. With a stroke so dexterous that the movement which accompanied it was scarcely perceptible, Sir Everard ran his sword through my friend's right arm. Poor Tom Briggs gave a groan and dropped his weapon. 'There, sir,' said Sir Everard, 'I think that is enough for you. I harbour no rancour, and have no wish to prolong so silly a quarrel; so, if you will tie your handkerchief round your arm, you can officiate for your friend yonder.'

Mr. Briggs bowed; and his second, Captain Cruckenell, contrived to bind his arm, which bled pretty freely, with a silk handkerchief that was almost big enough for the flag of a man-of-war. My friend Thomas has since told me that he suffered a mortal agony, but would have allowed his entrails to be gnawed, like the Spartan lad in the apologue, rather than betray any sign of his torture to Sir Everard.

'I had some conceit in my sword-play, Bob,' he said, 'and to think what a fool that scoundrel made of me. He did not give me an opportunity for one of my favourite feints. I was nowhere from the beginning.'

My own turn now came. I took my sword, with a feeling that this satisfaction which I had desired so eagerly was in some sort a suicide. But there was no pang of regret in the thought, so little was my life worth to me. I should have rejoiced had I been permitted to rid the earth of this villain; but if Fate, which from my youth upward had served me so hardly, were still against me, I was content.

We crossed swords. Lestrange seemed to hold his so lightly that a dexterous twist of mine might have whipped it out of his hand, but it was the lightness and delicacy of an experienced swordsman. Yet I

think he was hardly master of himself in this encounter, hatred held such complete possession of him; and had he been anything less accustomed to the exercise, or I a little more skilled in it, I might have gained an advantage over him. His countenance was livid with fury; and after a few formal passes he appeared to lose patience, and thrust at me with *coupé* after *coupé*, and with an amazing rapidity, breaking down my guard, and touching me with every thrust.

'Stop, Lestrange!' cried Major Blagrove; 'the fellow is wounded—'tis enough surely. Don't you see the blood on his shirt?'

The words were scarce spoken when I fell heavily, with my face towards the morning sky, and lay on the wet grass looking upward, with the skylark's song in my ears, and a vague idea that my life was fast ebbing away. The day had brightened a little; there was a chilly gleam of sunshine between the clouds. I heard voices above me consulting hurriedly, felt myself lifted from the ground, and, while my friends were thus raising me, swooned from the agony of a wound in my breast.

CHAPTER IV.

I SEEM TO BE INCONSTANT.

For nearly three months I lay at the point of death, or I should say rather, that during so long a period the issue was uncertain, and my malady might, at any moment, have ended fatally. During the greater part of that time I was out of my senses, and yet there is, strange to say, no episode of my life which I remember more keenly than the acute sufferings, mental and physical, of those dreary days and nights in which I lay at the mercy of a couple of hired nurses, at my chambers in Brick Court.

Poor Tom Briggs was laid up at the same time with his wounded arm, which kept him abed until the repairs of the *Cadmus* were finished, and it was time for him to rejoin that vessel. I was thus left for some weeks—which seemed an eternity of suffering—wholly in the hands of these two venal hags, who haled me about as if I been a log, incapable of pain,

poured nauseous medicines down my throat with a roughness which made their abominable drugs doubly nauseous, and administered poultices and cataplasms with an inhumanity which would have made such remedial processes an admirable adjunct to the tortures of the Spanish Inquisition.

To this day I have a picture often before my mental vision of this pair of tormentors, sitting at a little table by the fire playing cards, with a gin-bottle between them, and their grim shadows looming large upon the wall of my dimly lighted chamber. Fever made me delirious, and the stimulants that were freely administered to me to sustain a life which, by pain and loss of blood, was reduced to its lowest ebb, produced a morbid activity of the brain that degenerated into a noisy madness. For nights and days I acted over and over again, in my own rambling fashion, the events of my Indian campaign—was with Holwell at Fort William, or with Clive in the Mango Grove; now rescued Tara from the awful scene of murder in Omichund's mansion; now panted for breath amid the horrors of the Black Hole. Further back even went fancy and memory, and I was at Hauteville again, defending myself against the false accusations of Sir Marcus Lestrange.

With these recollections of realities were intermingled the visions of things that had never been—the faces of persons I had never known—which were yet none the less real to me in those hours of distraction, while, on the other hand, people who had played only the most trivial and accidental part in my life, people I had known long ago and forgotten, mixed themselves in all my visions, and became characters of supreme importance in this confused and yet vivid panorama.

Nor did the exaggeration of a disordered intellect—in which, as I conceive, the sense of wonder was unduly excited—end here. My own position underwent a strange transformation in these delirious visions. My Indian career was the triumph of a soldier and a politician who had taken the world by storm. It was not Clive, but I, who saved Bengal. Nay, I was Clive himself—at times losing all consciousness of my own identity, and acting the leading part in the great drama of which I had been an admiring spectator.

In these fantastic visions death was not. I saw Lady Barbara in the flower of her matronly beauty, and told myself that the story of her death had only been a trick played upon me. Philip Hay,

too, lived again, and was faithful to me. In every interval of physical pain my visions were of a roseate hue.

Yet, in all my delusions, I had an ever present consciousness of the two beldames who nursed me —the dingy withered hands—the foul breath—which were an unspeakable torture to my senses. Thus, for an eternity of pain and perplexity, I struggled on—sometimes thinking that I was shut up in those rooms by an enemy who plotted my death, and had set these two witches upon me to murder me; sometimes fancying that Everard Lestrange was in the next room, lurking behind the half-closed door, and watching me with malevolent eyes that gloated on my anguish.

In all this time sleep was a stranger to me. Sweet as the kiss of a long-lost friend was my first snatch of slumber—and far sweeter was my awakening.

It was dusk, and my room lighted only by the last warm glow of sunset. That stifling atmosphere which my hired nurses had kept up for the comfort of their own shrivelled bodies, by means of constant fires in the middle of May, and closed windows and doors, was exchanged for a refreshing coolness.

There was a perfume of the country, too, in the air; and lifting my dim eyes, I perceived a great nosegay of wallflowers in a bowl on the little table by my bed. Never before, since I had lain there, had I been indulged with such a luxury as a flower.

The room seemed empty; neither of my attendant harridans slumbered in the capacious armchair in which one of these guardians was wont to keep her comfortable watch, while the other slept on a sofa in my sitting-room. They were at cards, perhaps, in the next room, I thought; and yet there was no light to be seen through the crack of the door. I wondered vaguely what had become of them. They were absent, yet I fancied myself not alone; an unseen presence seemed near me. At one moment I thought I heard, behind the bed-curtain, the faint rustle of a silken petticoat; but my nurses wore fusty serge only. Then my eyelids closed involuntarily, and I slept.

From this time my condition was altered from the extremity of wretchedness to supreme comfort. My nights were still, for the most part, sleepless, and my mind still wandered; but the paths in which it strayed were paths of pleasantness. What

a rapturous vision was that which once, in the dead of night, beamed upon me! Methought I saw Dorothea Lestrange watching my pillow—a trick of fancy, like all the rest, doubtless; but, oh, 'twas a sweet delusion!

The time which followed I seemed to spend betwixt sleep and waking. My delirium grew less violent, and at last ceased altogether in its wilder form, though my senses were not yet restored.

I slept for hours and days at a stretch. Exhausted nature thus renewed her strength. My beldame nurses vanished, and in their place appeared a comfortable, homely visaged matron, who fed me with as gentle hands as if I had been a sick child. I took whatever was administered to me meekly enough from this kind attendant, and grew to like her homely countenance, which at times, when my mind was astray, I took for the face of my foster-mother.

Yet there was scarce a night passed in which I was not befooled by that phantom of the woman I loved hovering over my sick bed. With daylight, the sweet image vanished; and its absence, much more than the pain and languor I still suffered, made my days blank to me.

One morning, my mind being clearer than usual,

I took courage to question my nurse about this vision.

'Is there any one else but you who nurses me?' I asked; and for a moment I fancied the woman looked embarrassed by my inquiry.

She answered readily enough however.

'No, sir; you have had no other nurse but me, since Nurse Helps and Nurse Flanagan were sent away.'

'Who dismissed them?'

'The doctor. He found Mrs. Flanagan drunk one night, and Nurse Helps fast asleep, and so sent them both packing.'

'But at night I have seen some one else at my bedside—a lady.'

The nurse shook her head.

'Sick fancies, sir,' she said; 'your poor dear head has been wandering.'

"Yes, I know I have wandered—wander still, even, at night; but this seemed a reality. I could have sworn that I saw a lady I know bending over me, with a pensive anxious face, like a compassionate angel.'

'It might be an angel that you saw, Mr. Lestrange,' the nurse answered, smiling. 'You have

been snatched from the very brink of the grave; and who can tell what angel may have succoured you?'

I was convinced, yet languished for night and this dear vision; but, by a strange fatality, it never visited me after these inquiries.

Not long after, I had a relapse, and for some time I was again at close quarters with death. When this new attack of fever abated, I began to mend quickly, however, and I was in very good hands.

I awoke from a long sleep one summer afternoon —it was now June—and saw my window open, and felt the balmy air upon my face. There had always been a nosegay at my bedside since that first welcome bunch of wallflowers, and to-day I beheld a great bowl of roses, the first I had seen since my return to England. While I lay staring idly at these flowers, with a childish sense of pleasure, I heard the same sound of silken stuff rustling that I had heard in the twilight on that evening when first I missed my cruel nurses, only this time the sound was louder, and it was real.

A white hand drew back the curtain at the foot of the bed, and a sweet soft voice murmured, 'Are you awake, Robin?'

It was the voice of my foster-sister Margery.

I was ungrateful enough to feel a pang of disappointment. The face looking down upon me was as fair a face as ever looked upon man; but it was not the countenance that had visited me when my mind wandered; it was not that one only face which meant all the world for me.

'Is it you, Margery?' I asked, and I fancy some disappointment was palpable in the tone of my voice. 'Is it you I have seen night after night watching me?'

'Yes, dear Robin, I have been nursing you for some time. But you had been lying here ill a long while before I knew what had happened, and came to you. I had been wondering that you never came near me, and looking for you constantly of a night at the theatre, till I fancied at last you had left London. 'Twas only by accident that I heard of your duel with Sir Everard Lestrange, just three weeks ago.'

'And 'twas you, no doubt, who came to my rescue and drove away those brutal old women?'

'Nay, Robin, your doctor, Mr. Hallibury, had sent them away before I came, and good Mrs. Merle, your present nurse, was with you.'

'How did you hear of the duel at last?'

'From that poor foolish Johnson, who picked up the news at a tavern. Sir Everard had fought two duels the same morning, he told me, and had slain both his antagonists, but he could not give me the names of his victims. Coupling this news with your disappearance, I took fright, and came here straight to find out the worst. Ah, Robert, thou could'st never dream what rapture it was to thy poor foster-sister to find thee living! Since that day I have only quitted you to go to the theatre at night.'

After this I could hardly doubt that the figure I had seen was Margery's, and that my fancy, preoccupied with Dora's image, had transformed it into the likeness of her I loved. Mrs. Merle's denial of any other presence than her own I took to be a sick nurse's judicious subterfuge, intended to protect me from undue excitement.

'Dear Margery,' I said, touched by so much devotion, 'what have I done to deserve your goodness? And you have acted every evening, and nursed me by night! What a burden!'

'A privilege, Robert, and not a burden. But now you are getting so much better I shall very soon leave you.'

After this my mind wandered no more. Slowly,

almost like a child, on whom the light of reason dawns gradually, I awoke to the realities of life, and looked back upon my strange dreams with a blush, as if they had been voluntary follies of which I had need to feel ashamed. Slowly I realized, in a hard every-day light wherein I had never looked upon it before, the insurmountable distance between myself and Dora. Again and again, before my meeting with Lestrange, I had told myself that in the event of his death Dora and I must be for ever strangers. Yet, now the duel was fought and done with, I felt as if I had lost a hope. It would at least have been something to have freed her. As it was, she was still the wife of a villain, without hope of release.

In spite of my troubles, however, I felt cheered and comforted by Margery's presence. There was comfort in the thought that I was not utterly forsaken—that this generous soul cared for me. How beyond measure lonely should I have been without her friendship!

The consideration of this fact inspired me with the liveliest gratitude, and on no day did I omit to thank and bless her for her goodness to me.

'How comes it, Margery,' I said upon one occasion, 'that you, who are so much admired—whose

head might fairly be turned by the worship of a town—should condescend to devote all these hours to me?'

'The town is a poor substitute for home and kindred, Robert!' she answered softly; 'but you remind me of the first, and seem to me to stand in place of the second. As for the town—well, I will not pretend that I do not value success, I should be a sorry actress if I didn't: applause is the food we live upon. Yet, although my heart thrills at a hearty round from the pit and gallery, I have never set much value upon the praises of those fine gentlemen critics who hang about the green-room. Their compliments have always a contemptuous flavour.'

'Have you heard of Sir Everard since the duel, Margery?' I asked.

She coloured crimson at the question.

'Yes, I have heard of him.'

'And you have seen him, I fancy, from your face?'

'Yes, he has been behind the scenes several times. Oh, Robert, can you imagine so mean a creature? He knows how I hate him, and with what good reason. He knows that I might be an innocent happy woman but for him—for sure, inno-

cence and happiness must go together, since guilt is such a burden. He knows this, and yet will come and whisper in my ear; and threatens to let the world know my wretched story if I repulse him.'

'Scoundrel!' I cried; 'when I am once up and on foot, Margery, there shall be an end of this persecution.'

She sighed, and shook her head doubtfully.

'Alas, dear Robert, I know you are brave and true, and would willingly defend me from him. Yet what could you do to stop his infamy? You have been very near the loss of your life already, in the attempt to punish him.'

'There is a way to protect you, Margery,' I said, and then grew grave and silent, thinking of that way.

This conversation took place in the days of my convalescence. I was now strong enough to sit in an easy-chair by the open window, during the brightest hours of the summer day. My foster-sister had been nursing me several weeks, with an unvarying care and tenderness. We had been more together that time than we had ever been since those childish days when we hunted the young rabbits in Hauteville; and I had seen much

to admire and respect in Margery's character—a purity untarnished even by contact with Everard Lestrange, a candour and a generosity that could belong only to an elevated nature. Her beauty was, in my mind, the least of her gifts; and yet she was certainly the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

During this period of my convalescence, which progressed slowly at the best, my devoted nurse entertained me with many a record of her adventures when she was only a strolling player; representing with admirable mimicry the strange creatures with whom she had consorted in those days, the small envyings and petty jealousies, the varieties and follies of a race who seemed to me to be a kind of overgrown children. She told me the wild delight which thrilled her soul when a London parson, a friend of Garrick, found her acting *Rosalind* in a barn, and promised to recommend her to the great actor. It was a year afterwards, when she had quite given up the idea of hearing any more of this admirer and patron, that Garrick himself saw her act *Jane Shore* at the Corn Exchange at Chelmsford, and came behind the scenes, when the play was over, to engage her.

'I walked on air that night, Robert,' she said

when she told me the story, 'and then came an interval of sickening fear. I could scarce trust myself to sleep of a night, so agonizing were my dreams of failure. It was in *Jane Shore* I was to make my first appearance. Christmas was hardly over, and the gallery still eager for the pantomime. The other actresses told me I could not have had a worse time to appear, and that if Mr. Garrick wished me to succeed he would surely have done better for me. "He only wants you for a stopgap, my dear," said one friendly soul, "because Clive is in the tantrums and has gone to the Garden. When she comes back you'll have notice to quit. You don't know the selfishness of managers." Yet,' she added with a proud smile, '*I made them hear me*, and they waited for their pantomime so quietly, that you might have heard a pin drop while I was dying.'

'I dare say this public homage is the very breath of your nostrils, Margery,' I said, smiling at her enthusiasm. She shook her head, with a faint sigh.

'Nay, Robert, it is well enough, but it is not all the world.'

'What!' I cried, 'can you imagine a brighter world than that fairyland the theatre?'

'Not a brighter, perhaps, if by brightness you mean dazzle and fever; but a better and a happier. Oh, Robert, do you know, there are times, even now, while I am still young and the public has not begun to tire of me—times when I feel so sadly, sadly lonely, and when all that applause from people who know nothing of me, and can scarce care whether I am living or dead, seems the hollowest thing in the world. Sometimes, in the very midst of one of my favourite characters, when the fire of the player's passion has burned strongest in me, the flame dies out all at once, and I am as cold as ice, and feel what a foolish miserable show it is, and I no better than a puppet dressed in satin and tinsel. Then I think what all my life to come is to be—the theatre, night after night, with the same dependence upon the breath of public favour; a poor paid slave at best, and the constant dread of that day when the town will grow weary of me gnawing at my empty heart. And when I grow old, Robert—and how stealthily will age creep on——'

'You will have made a great fortune by that time, Margery, and can have your villa at Hampton, like Garrick, or a pretty rustic cottage like that

of Mrs. Clive's which you told me about, next door to Horace Walpole's toy castle.'

'A villa or a cottage, Robert, can make little difference to old age and loneliness.'

'But why must your age needs be lonely, dear Margery? Do you think that, at five-and-twenty, with beauty, fame, and a public career, the story of your life is finished? You will live to be an honoured and happy wife, dear sister, and that remote old age you talk of will be cheered and lightened by the love of children.'

Her brow clouded suddenly with a look that was almost severe.

'Never, Robert!' she said gravely. 'Never! Do you forget who and what I am? His cast-off mistress! Do you think *I* shall ever forget those words? His cast-off mistress! If ever in some triumph of the hour I do just for a moment forget that bitter past, I can speedily recollect myself by recalling your words that night. What honest man would marry me, knowing my story? Or if there were any man weak enough or base enough to do it, do you think I would suffer him to stoop so low? No, Robert, the story of my life ended seven years ago. I shall live and die alone.'

There was a tragic power, a depth of feeling in her looks and tones, that gave her speech a double significance. I felt that every word was real. This humility of spirit—this sense of a degradation too deep to be blotted out by years of remorse—was no womanly device to charm a lover, or apologize for a fault.

I remembered the days when Margery and I sat side by side on a little wooden stool in the chimney corner, and when I used to swear that she and no other should be my wife. I remembered our fond childish dreams of a hut in the rabbit-warren, furnished with a provision of beech-nuts and withered apples, which were to serve for our sustenance. I remembered the time when Margery's was for me the one bright face in this world.

I had loved another since then—loved honestly, faithfully, devotedly, and in vain. No star of hope shone upon my dark horizon. The woman I loved was divided from me for ever. And what was my life worth to me that I should hesitate to bestow it in payment of a debt of gratitude? This faithful girl was the one only friend who had come to me in my desolation; and if she still loved me—as I was at times inclined to suspect—if she needed an honest

man's arm to defend her from a profligate—should I be cold enough to leave her lonely?

There was silence between us for a little while. Margery stood by the open window, with her round white arms folded on the broad wooden sill, and the summer breeze lifting the loose tresses from her brow. It was sunset, and the rosy western light shone on her face as she looked far away towards the open country. Her eyes had a dreaming look. The sweet lower lip, which, like Sophia Weston's, pouted a little, as if a bee had stung it newly, drooped now with a sorrowful expression. She was a thorough woman. Renown, fortune, the most brilliant life that woman ever lived, were not enough to satisfy that vague yearning of an empty heart.

Brief as our silence was, I had thought earnestly before I broke it.

'Suppose, Margery,' I began at last, 'there were a man who knew your story from the first page to the last—knew how your rustic innocence was betrayed by a villain—knew all—and yet could esteem and honour you as one of the best and purest among women. Suppose there were such an one, Margery, and he were able to offer you, not the fervid passion of a heart that has never loved—alas! his

was wounded to death years ago, and can never beat again but with a sober affection—but at least the respect and regard which has served for the happiness of many households. Nay, my dear, why beat about the bush? You know that it is of myself I speak. It is but a poor offer to make you, Margery, from one who has little to give, but it comes straight from a fond and grateful heart.'

She stood motionless while I spoke, but at my last words covered her face with her hands, and burst into a flood of tears.

'Oh, Robert,' she cried, 'for God's sake, do not tempt me!'

'A sorry temptation, Margery,' I said; 'I offer you a husband whose whole stock of worldly wealth is something less than three thousand pounds, and who can scarce hope better than at sixty to be a major in the East India Company's service.'

'Robert, don't tempt me,' she repeated piteously. 'No, no. I meant what I said just now. If any man were weak enough to forget my position, these lips should remind him of it. Your wife, Robert? No! A thousand times no. Alas! dear friend, do I not know your story, and where your heart was given? Let us be friends, and friends only. It will

be happier for both of us. Yes, Robert, much happier. I love you too well to accept anything less than your heart.'

I need not record the precise words in which I persuaded her to set aside this decision. Her humility had touched me more deeply than I can express—gratitude, memory of the past, compassion, every tender sentiment *except* love, prompted the step which I now pledged myself to take—and thus, moved by the impulse of the hour, I relinquished my liberty, and of my own free will accepted that very position into which it had been Everard Lestrange's worst infamy to endeavour to entrap me!

CHAPTER V.

I BEGIN LIFE ON A NEW PLAN.

I BELIEVE that in our strange courtship Margery was happy—with a subdued sense of joy and satisfaction which betrayed itself in no exuberance of spirits. Her happiness seemed rather an inward light, which brightened her beautiful countenance with a sweet calm radiance. My recovery, even when I had left my bed, was slow, and for a long time after that summer evening, upon which Margery and I had plighted our troth, I was still upon the sick list. The dear girl was as constantly with me as her engagements at the theatre would permit, and on those evenings when she was not in the playbill, we drove together into the suburbs, in a light open carriage, hired from a stable near Blackfriars Bridge. We felt ourselves quite alone in the world, and were neither of us bound by any of those unwritten laws which in other circles might

have hindered so free an intercourse. Yet, by a strange caprice, Margery entreated that our engagement might be kept a secret from the people at the theatre.

'There are malicious souls amongst them,' she said. 'Who knows what mischief they might plot between us?'

'Nay, Madge, that is not possible.'

'Sure, Robert, you do not know what is possible to malice. Let us keep our secret to ourselves. That night you came to my room at the theatre, I told my dresser you were my brother. It was all over the theatre next morning that Mrs. Hunter had a brother come home from India. No one but that jealous Johnson ever suspected you to be any one else.'

'Let him know me in my true character, Margery, and put an end to his jealousy.'

'No, Robert,' she said, with a pretty tyrannical air which she had learned to assume of late, and which became her infinitely. I suspect it comes natural to every woman in this position. 'No, Robert, I will have no vulgar broil between you and Johnson. Believe me, you are best away from the theatre and all that belong to it. I daresay actors

and actresses have no worse vices than other people—and we know they have virtues that are all their own—but it is hard work to get on with them.'

'And Sir Everard Lestrange, Margery—has that villain ceased to torment you?' I asked suspiciously, doubtful that she had some motive, some womanly fear for my own safety, in keeping me away from the theatre.

'He has been in Paris for the last six weeks, Robin. We are happily rid of him.'

'Is that the truth, Margery?'

'What, sir!' she cried, flashing out at me with that pretty petulance of hers, 'do you imagine I would tell you a lie?'

'Women are such cowards, my dear—for those they love.'

'And Heaven knows how well I love you, Robin,' she answered softly.

'Then you must humour my fancies a little more, Margery. I want to be initiated in the mysteries of your life behind the scenes.'

'You shall come to the green-room some night, Robert, when you are quite well,' she answered, coaxingly, and I was fain to be content.

Was I happy in this gentle bondage, and did the

contemplation of this new life grow sweeter to me as the time that was to make Margery my wife drew nearer? Alas! no; for me to love once had been to love for ever. My thoughts by day, my dreams by night, still hovered round the old shrine. I felt like those low-caste Indians who, when they worship their god, deposit their offering, by prescriptive right, on a stone outside the temple, and never venture to cross the threshold. So, with me, my tribute of tender regrets, my sacrifice of pain, could only be laid at the door of the sacred place that held my goddess. Yet, if I was not in love with my plighted wife, I did not do her so great a wrong as to regret the step I had taken that summer night, when her lonely situation awakened my pity, and her devotion to myself challenged my gratitude. I think, were the histories of many peaceful unions discovered, they would be found based upon no warmer attachment than that which bound me to Margery. There are few men of so ascetic a temper as to go down to the grave lonely and childless because the bright particular star of their worship shines in a heaven beyond their reach. A man will cherish the dear image of his first love till the hour of death, yet be an affectionate husband to

another woman, and a fond father to her children. I believe your confirmed bachelor is rarely a disappointed lover—the man who loves passionately in his youth is of too tender a disposition to escape from some entanglement in his manhood—but rather a fellow of so cold a nature that he has never truly loved at all, and who, after a youth of trifling pleasures, glides into an age of comfortable selfishness.

It was of course agreed between us that Margery would bid farewell to the stage for ever, before our wedding-day. She would surrender all the delights and triumphs of her art to become the wife of an obscure lieutenant in the Company's service. She, the cynosure of the town, would let the curtain fall for ever on her glory, and resign all the profits and raptures of success, to follow the precarious fortunes of a soldier, in a strange country, among a barbarous people, in peril and uncertainty of every kind.

Again and again I asked her if she had weighed the sacrifice she was going to make for me.

'Consider, dearest girl,' I said, 'how much you give up, and how little I can bestow upon you in exchange for all you lose. More than once you have

described to me the delicious intoxication of your art—the thrilling delight of those nights of triumph when the theatre rings with your name. Do you not think the nights will seem blank and empty in Bengal?'

'I shall be with you, Robin, and Bengal will be home.'

'A cheerless home, dear, and with many drawbacks. My short experience of India has taught me to consider it a land of hidden perils. It is not alone the cobra that may lurk in a corner of the chamber where your children are at play, Madge, or the tiger that may steal into your compound at sundown. There are enemies more fatal—the men whom we trust.'

'I will face them all, Robin, by your side,' she answered, with a bright, fearless look.

'You fancy the life will be romantic, perhaps—an existence of excitement and adventure. Put that out of your thoughts. Life in India is dulness and monotony itself.'

'Have I ever seemed dull with you, Robin?'

'And some day, when your regrets for your lost glories are keenest, there may come, perchance, a bitter awakening, and you will discover that your

preference for me was but a childish day-dream—a girl's fond, foolish fancy.'

'I think I begin to understand you, Mr. Ainsleigh,' she exclaimed indignantly; 'you repent having done me the honour to offer me your hand, and these arguments are designed to secure your escape. There is no occasion for any such round-about method. You are free as air, sir!'

What could I do but protest that such a notion was foreign to my thoughts, that I was most happy in the security of her affection? And, indeed, I could but feel proud of a devotion which I deserved so ill, and in my prayers at this period of my life, I rarely omitted to supplicate that I might be able to requite Margery's generous attachment with an affection as unalloyed as her own.

After this conversation I ceased for ever to torment her with doubts and objections, and our courtship went all the more smoothly for my prudence. I let her see that I valued her love, and revered herself, and I think from this time forward she was entirely happy in my society.

We were to be married late in the autumn, by which time my leave of absence would have expired, and I should return to India an officer in the Company's

75574

service. My pay in this capacity would hardly have allowed me so expensive a luxury as a wife; but after all expenses of my illness were paid—the last nurse, Mrs. Merle, was singularly moderate in her charges, while the hags who preceded her made up for their wretched service by the exorbitance of their demands—I had still two thousand five hundred pounds remaining of the three thousand I received when I left Bengal. I had thus a fair fortune in ready money to start with—and I knew that Margery was rich. I considered that, before my own funds could be exhausted, I should in all probability have risen in my regiment, while in the Indian service there were brilliant chances of reward from plundered palaces and confiscated treasuries.

As soon as I was able to travel, I proposed going down to Berkshire to see my foster-father. My lips alone should tell him the story of his daughter's life; and I entertained no doubt of winning his forgiveness and esteem for the only child he had once loved so fondly.

'I shall bring him to you a proud and happy man, Margery!' I said; 'and he shall give us his blessing on our wedding-day.'

'I think he will scarce refuse to forgive when you

plead for me, Robin,' she answered with that pathetic look she wore always when speaking of her father. And then with a sudden anxiety she exclaimed,—'You will not stay long away, Robin?'

'Nay, dear, I will be as brief as a traveller can be. But I must stop a few hours with poor old Anthony Grimshaw. It will be my last visit to Hauteville before I leave England, and certainly the last time I can hope to look upon that once friendly face.'

'Oh, Robin,' she cried, clasping her hands, 'I beseech you to come quickly back to me!'

'My dearest, why be anxious about so short a journey?'

'You are going amongst enemies. That Grimshaw woman hates you.'

'Her hatred can hurt me no further.'

'How can you know that? And who knows but that Sir Everard Lestrange may get news of your visit through her, if you wait long enough to give her the opportunity of communicating with him, and may try to do you a mischief?'

'Nay, Madge, Sir Everard Lestrange and I have done with each other. Malicious as he is, what ill-will can he bear against a wretch whom he has

worsted in everything? Friends—fortune—wife—he has taken all from me, and is too triumphant to feel any sentiment but scorn on my behalf.'

'Your wife, yes,' she answered, with a touch of bitterness; 'that was the wrong that stung deepest.'

'It did, Margery, but it is a very old wound. There is only the cicatrice left. I have no fear of Lestrange, Madge, except where you are concerned; and you told me he was in Paris.'

'That was the last I heard of him from Johnson, who makes it his business to be informed of that gentleman's movements. But he may be in England,—at Hauteville, for aught I know to the contrary.'

'That is hardly likely, dear. He has no passion for the place. But let me meet him where I may, I have no fear of him, and should indeed be heartily glad of any chance that might arise of a new reckoning between us.'

'Just what I feared,' cried Margery; 'there would be a quarrel between you, and this time he would make his revenge sure. Rely upon it, 'tis a bitter regret to him to have failed when last you met.'

'He is a villain, Madge, and I doubt not will

come to a villainous end; but be assured that he has ceased to trouble himself about me; nor am I likely to give Mrs. Grimshaw time to communicate the news of my appearance at Hauteville to him. Indeed, if you are really anxious upon the subject, I promise you that my stay in Berkshire shall not exceed twenty-four hours.'

'Promise me that, dear Robert, and you will take a weight off my heart. You will carry your pistols with you, of course?'

'I will provide myself against the possibility of highwaymen if you desire it, my dear.'

'And this Indian dagger, Robert, you might wear that in your breast.'

This she said standing on tip-toe to reach a weapon I had arranged with three or four others above the mantelpiece.

It was at my own rooms this conversation took place. September had begun, and the days were growing chill, so Margery had ordered my laundress to keep fires in both rooms, and we were standing by the hearth as we talked.

The dagger which she handed me was a gift from Mr. Holwell—a slim, sharp blade of damascened steel, rapier-shaped, with a massive silver hilt; a

dagger which was said to have belonged to the Emperor Jehangeer. The weapon seemed less formidable than it really was, for half the blade was sheathed in the hilt, and only flew out on the pressure of a spring artfully hidden in the silversmith's work. I had shown the toy to Margery one idle afternoon, and had told her its history.

'You will wear this, Robin?' she said pleadingly.

'My dear child, one would suppose we lived in the middle ages, or were Venetian citizens in the days when secret denunciations were slipped into the lion's mouth. But, if it pleases you, I will put the toy in my pocket.'

'Do, dear Robin. You know not what snare may be laid for you. 'Tis the first time you will have gone far from home since your meeting with that man.'

I laughed at her womanish fears, and rallied her into better spirits.

This occurred on the day before my journey, and on a Sunday. Margery and I had been to the Temple Church together, and had returned to Brick Court for a glass of madeira and a biscuit after the service.

I was to sup with her that evening at her lodgings,

and start next morning at daybreak by the 'Velocity' coach for Warborough.

'These dear Sundays have been so sweet to me, Robin,' the fond creature said, as she sat sipping her wine, of which she consumed about as much as a robin might have done; 'no theatre, no crowd, no noise and bustle, only you. A long day and a long evening together—long to look forward to, that is to say, Robin, but, oh, so swift to pass!'

And then she repeated a question which she had of late grown very fond of asking me,—

'Oh, Robert, are you sure you love me?'

How could I answer so tender an inquiry, propounded with such bewitching humility by lips as lovely as ever spoke to man? What could I do but assure her of my devotion, declaring that not to adore her would be to confess myself a wretch unworthy the name of man.

'And you have forgotten the past, Robin, and are happy?' she asked.

'I am quite happy, dearest.'

She gave a little sigh of relief, and turned to me with a radiant smile.

'Why, then, I will be quite happy too, Robert,' she said, 'and bid a truce to all those petty agonies

of jealousy—jealousy of the past—of the future—of I know not what—which have consumed my heart.'

We supped together gaily at nine o'clock that evening. Margery had made quite a feast in my honour, and the champagne sparkled merrily in our glasses. We were lingering over the meal, and I was repeating some of those Indian adventures which this kind soul seemed never to weary of—and to which she would listen, breathless, with her lips apart, and her eyes fixed, and full of an awful wonder, as if she could see the scenes I described to her. I was in the midst of a description when we were startled by a tremendous knock on the street door, and then a man's voice below.

'Sure I know that voice,' cried Madge, starting up from the table, and going over to the door, which she opened a little way, softly. 'Yes, I thought as much. It is that foolish fellow, Johnson. He is prompter, as you know, and it is his duty to bring me news of any change in the business—or the rehearsals. I have given him a supper, sometimes, Robert, for he was kind to me whem I was poor, and his salary is hardly enough to keep him and the bedridden mother that lives with him. We vagabonds

are fond of our kindred, you see, Robert. I daresay he observed the lights, and fancied I had company.'

Her woman came in at this moment. 'Mr. Johnson is below, madam, and begs to see you on important business.'

'Important business! I suppose the rehearsal to-morrow morning is to be half an hour earlier than Saturday's call.'

'Let him come in Madge,' I said; 'tis a simple, harmless creature. I shall not be jealous of him.'

'No—but he may take it into his poor addled brain to be jealous of you. Ask him to walk upstairs, Sally—and put clean plates and a knife and fork at that end of the table. And bring another bottle of champagne.' She resumed her seat with a little sigh of resignation.

'I fear he will worry you to death, Robert,' she said; 'there never was a more egotistical creature.'

She had scarce spoken when the gentleman was announced. He came into the room with that Congreve and Wycherly swagger which resembles the bearing of no human creature, except a third-rate actor—his elbow rounded, his left hand resting lightly on his hip—a thing of flourishes and attitudes. His plum-coloured cloth suit was threadbare,

and brushed to attenuation; his stockings were silk, but yellow with long usuage and much washing, ornamented with more than one specimen of that kind of dilapidation which is I believe called a Jacob's ladder; but as a set-off against this too apparent decay, he sported a Ramilies cravat of cheap new lace, with a tinsel brooch in it; a pair of paste shoe-buckles; ruffles, which half-covered his skinny hands; a freshly-powdered toupet; and a court-sword, with a cut steel hilt.

He saluted me stiffly, and regarded my presence with evident dissatisfaction, but seemed not ill-pleased to take a seat at the supper-table, to which Margery hospitably invited him. But even this invitation he accepted with a somewhat lofty air, as of a man to whom champagne and chicken were matters of daily occurrence.

'Since you are so pressing,' he said, 'I will amuse myself with a wing while I inform you what brought me here. I should not have intruded upon you on a Sunday evening, and when, as your woman told me, you had company, except upon business. There is a change in the performance to-morrow night.'

'Indeed.'

'Yes; *Lear* is withdrawn. The great little man'—this with a scornful laugh—'is ill, or perhaps finds the season dull, and the audience languid. Why, his Lear is no original conception, sir, but a slavish copy from the life, founded upon some poor wretch of a tradesman in Hatton Garden, whose favourite grandchild fell out of a window while he was playing with her and was killed upon the spot, and who, being driven mad by the catastrophe, used to sit and mope at a window, where our friend David saw him. The performance is a mere piece of Dutch painting, as low in art as that faithful reproduction of pots and pans which your connoisseur pretends to admire in the Flemish school. And this is the genius which the town runs mad about—or rather, which the public has been talked into admiring by a little knot of dilettanti!'

'I have no doubt, sir, that had you an opening, you would astonish the town with some new ideas,' I said politely.

'Sir,' he replied, with a solemn air, after tossing off a tumbler of champagne by way of preliminary,—'sir, 'tis but a grovelling notion of tragedy which will copy the madness of a king from

a distraught tradesman in Hatton Garden. My Lear soars into the region of the ideal. It is above the heads of the vulgar crowd—so far above them, indeed, that in a temporary theatre at Stockton-upon-Tees, where the populace is ignorant as dirt, I was pelted—yes, sir, pelted. I did not mind their missiles. I felt like St. Stephen—the St. Stephen of dramatic art; and I think, sir, as I gazed upwards to the gallery at the close of the performance, amidst a shower of heterogeneous objects, from oyster-shells to orange-peel, my countenance must have been illumined by some ray of that intellectual lustre which in the saint became transfiguration. I hope there is no blasphemy, sir, in the comparison which has occurred to me more than once when reflecting upon that passage in my life.'

'You have not acted Lear in London, Mr. Johnson?' I inquired. He shook his head with a tremendous significance.

'No, sir, David knows better than to allow that. His version of that sublime character goes down well enough with a public that has been surfeited with the mannerisms of Quin and Betterton. But once let in upon them the light of a loftier concep-

tion, and David's little candle would be extinguished for ever. He is wise in his generation, sir, and knows that. Why, I have a reading of Richard the Third, sir, which the man who calls himself my master in his most inspired moment never dreamt of.'

The poor, half-demented creature rambled on in this way for an hour, and still Margery pressed meat and drink upon him. He ate the best part of a chicken, and emptied the champagne bottle which had been opened expressly for him; and by the time he came to his last glass, betrayed an excitement which, in so weak-brained a being, was near akin to lunacy.

'You think that I shall never push my way to the front, I dare swear, Mrs. Hunter,' he said, growing suddenly affronted with Margery, who had been betrayed into a smile during one of his rhapsodies. 'I saw you laugh just now, and I have heard that you sided with Mr. Garrick in making a joke of me the other night in the green-room. You think that Garrick can crush me for ever. You are mistaken, madam. There is a kind of fire that will not be damped so easily. It smoulders, madam—it smoulders—and will some

day burst into flame. The world shall hear of me—ay, Mrs. Hunter, it shall hear—even if it be as it heard of him who fired the Ephesian dome. And who knows if the so-called madman who did that work of destruction was not one who could have built as splendid a temple as that which he annihilated, if he had had the chance? I tell you, madam, if I cannot build, I will destroy. I will not perish unknown. What is that the Latin poet says—"If the gods of heaven will not help me, why, then, I will move Acheron itself to compass my desire."'

He had risen on finishing his supper, and was now pacing the room as he talked. Margery tried to soothe him.

'Nay, Mr. Johnson,' she said, 'why make yourself unhappy because you have not the first rank? You are twice as well off as in the days when you and I were strolling players. It is not to be imagined that the manager of Drury Lane will descend from his throne in order to bid you mount in his place.'

'In money, perhaps, madam. In reputation I am a much poorer man. Then at least I had sometimes the chance of shining in a leading character—though even in a barn I was envied and plotted

against. Now the most I am entrusted with is some third-rate walking gentleman in a comedy, or a gray-haired twaddling father that does not appear till the fifth act.'

After stalking to and fro for some time in this fashion, his wan face flushed with wine, and his eyes glaring with excitement, he turned upon Margery with a sudden fierceness and exclaimed,—

'So, madam, your admirer is in town?'

She started, and looked at me; then recovering herself quickly, said,—

'Which admirer, Mr. Johnson? I hope I have several among the public who come to see me act.'

'What, madam, you pretend not to understand me! You affect to be ignorant of his return——'

'Mr. Johnson,' I said, interrupting him, 'this is not a tone in which I am accustomed to hear that lady addressed. I must beg you to moderate your excitement.'

'Sir,' cried this poor half-distraught creature, 'I take my orders from no man. No, sir, not from you, however nearly related you may be to Mrs. Hunter. But the lady knows, if my heart's blood would purchase her the gratification of a moment, I would freely shed it, to the last drop.'

He wiped away a tear or two, with a somewhat maudlin air, flourishing a ragged handkerchief which had evidently been employed in its better days in the tragedy of *Othello*, for I observed that there were strawberries worked upon it in red cotton.

'She knows that, sir,' he went on, 'or she knows nothing of me. The admirer of whom I speak is that reprobate who has made his pursuit of Mrs. Hunter notorious to half the town—who is even said to have laid a wager with one of his boon companions that he will make her his mistress.'

'Is Everard Lestrange in London?' I inquired eagerly.

'I have it upon excellent authority, sir, that he was seen last night going into a club-house in Pall Mall, where it is one of his amiable customs to play whist for a dozen hours at a stretch. Indeed, I have heard of his being discovered with his companions in the morning sitting knee-deep in pasteboard.'

I looked at Margery, and in that moment resolved to defer my journey to Hauteville, in order to remain at hand to protect her from this scoundrel.

'The insolence of this person, sir,' I said to Mr. Johnson, 'is a kind of insult to which Mrs. Hunter's public life unfortunately exposes her. Sir

Everard will find, however, that he will not be permitted to annoy her with impunity.'

The actor laughed scornfully.

'What! sir,' he exclaimed, 'do you suppose that the gentleman would stoop to fight you? *I* have challenged him three times, and have been denied the right of satisfaction with actual contumely.'

'I daresay I might find a way of redress, sir.'

'Ay, sir. There are methods of redress for a man who holds his life cheaply; and let Sir Everard Lestrange beware of such an one.'

'Nay, my good friends,' cried Margery, 'this is much ado about nothing. Sir Everard can do me no harm. He did for some time persecute me with letters, and even costly presents, which he caused to be sent to my lodgings; but, as I returned the letters unopened, and sent back his gifts as fast as they came, he at last desisted. The worst thing he has done has been to speak ill of me; and, as he happens to be a notorious liar, the world has been kind enough to disbelieve him on this occasion.'

Mr. Johnson looked at her suspiciously.

'I dare swear,' he said, 'this kind of pursuit, discreditable as it may be, is pleasing to the vanity of a woman.'

'Mrs. Hunter is not the kind of woman to be gratified by such incense,' I said, sternly; and then, looking at my watch, proposed that, as it was near midnight, we should both take leave of our hostess.

'I have a few words to say to you in private, Margery,' I said; 'so, with your permission, will stay five minutes later than Mr. Johnson.'

The wretched man glared at me savagely, jealousy gnawing his vitals; but, as Margery put her hand into his, and wished him good-night in a somewhat imperative manner, he was fain to retire.

'You did not tell me what the play was to be to-morrow night,' she said, when he was at the door.

''Tis not yet decided; but it will be *Douglas* or *Jane Shore*, I daresay. I will bring you word at noon to-morrow,' he answered, with an offended air, and then left the room without honouring me with a salute.

As soon as this gentleman was departed, I told Margery that, as Sir Everard was in town, I would defer my visit to Hauteville until after our marriage, which event we could hasten by some weeks; and instead of bringing Jack Hawker up to London, to

be reconciled to his daughter, I could carry Margery down to the cottage as my wife.

'I want to secure the best right to defend you from that villain, Madge,' I said.

'What! Robert,' she cried, bitterly, 'and do you think his malicious soul will not rejoice when he hears of our marriage—rejoice to know that you have, of your own accord, taken the position he tried to force upon you?'

'Nay, Margery,' I replied, 'you undervalue yourself strangely. Time has altered the aspect of the situation. The marriage into which he entrapped me was an union with a simple country girl —not the cynosure of the town. He has fallen in love with you a second time, Madge, and rely upon it, the passion of his mature age is more desperate than the fancy of his youth. He will be mad when he hears of our marriage.'

Anxious, however, as Margery had been upon the subject of my journey to Berkshire, she was, with feminine inconsistency, disinclined to permit me to forego it. Again and again she assured me that it was impossible she could suffer any inconvenience from Sir Everard's presence in London.

'As to our marriage taking place any sooner than

we arranged, Robert, that is quite impossible,' she said. 'I must finish the season with Mr. Garrick, who has been very good to me, and whom I would not disappoint on any account. Nor will I ever appear before the public as your wife; and I have set my heart upon my father being present at my wedding. Oh, Robin, that word marriage has been such a mockery for me! I want, for once, to be married like an honest woman.'

The words smote me to the heart, and for a moment I could scarcely answer her. And she was my chosen wife after all—the woman I spurned seven years ago.

Perceiving that she was really bent upon my seeing her father without delay, I consented, somewhat unwillingly, to start next morning, as I had arranged, resolving, at the same time, to make my absence as brief as possible. So I wished this dear soul good-bye and left her, full of anxiety about me. She accompanied me to the street-door, and hung about me fondly, entreating that I would be careful.

'You are not very strong yet awhile, Robin,' she said, 'and the mornings and evenings are so cold. Be sure you keep the coach-window shut on your side, and do not walk too far.'

I kissed her, and pledged myself to take especial charge of so precious a being as Mr. Robert Ainsleigh.

'Upon my honour, Madge,' I said, half laughing at her carefulness, 'I do not believe there is a man upon this earth worthy of a true woman's love. There is no creature but an infant pure enough to deserve so sublime an affection.' On which she broke out into a tender panegyric of her humble servant, which would have made the vainest man blush for his unworthiness.

I had not gone far before I discovered that I had left Jehangeer's famous dagger behind me. I now remembered that I had taken it from my pocket in the course of the evening, when showing Margery some papers, and had laid it upon a little tea-table in one of the windows. I would not, however, return for it, at the risk of disturbing the house, since I had only consented to carry the thing about me in deference to a whim of Margery's, and for my own part looked upon the weapon as an encumbrance, of which accident had happily rid me.

'Poor Madge will be vexed when she finds it,' I said to myself, 'but she will know that I have my pistols.'

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

I STARTED for Warborough at daybreak next morning, inside the coach—a mode of travelling which I detested, and with the window up, in compliance with my kind mistress's injunction. While the coach stood in the yard of the inn, I was somewhat puzzled by the appearance of a man whose countenance seemed strangely familiar to me, yet whose identity I could not discover. He was a short, stunted-looking man, broad across the shoulders, which were bent as if with habitual stooping, but somewhat shrivelled about the legs. He wore an iron-gray beard which concealed the lower part of his face, and, in conjunction with his hooked nose, gave him a somewhat Jewish aspect; and he was muffled to the chin in a long overcoat and woollen neckerchief. He carried a wooden case, slung to his shoulder, and I set him down at once as a Jew

pedlar, and was all the more mystified by that vivid sensation of having seen him before, as I had never had any dealings with that confraternity. This gentleman mounted the coach and took his seat on the roof, while I was wondering about him.

The day was cold and dull, and I had no especial reason to regret my promise to ride inside. It was four in the afternoon when we reached Warborough, after stopping to dine on the road. I looked at dinner for my Israelitish pedlar, but he did not show himself in the room where we dined, and I had no further opportunity of making up my mind as to whether I had or had not seen him before. It was an insignificant question to occupy my attention, but in the enforced idleness of the journey I had found myself dwelling upon it with ridiculous persistency, coming back after the most serious thoughts to the repeated inquiry, 'Where have I seen that fellow?'

Remembering Margery's injunctions that I was not to fatigue myself, and being anxious to make the shortest work of my business in Berkshire, I hired a vehicle at the 'George' to take me over to Hauteville without delay, and drove straight to the cottage, where I was lucky enough to find honest Jack and his wife at home.

I had prepared myself carefully for this meeting, and had arranged my plan of action after considerable deliberation.

I had thought at first of telling John Hawker the simple truth about his daughter's story, suppressing no painful passage in her life, and trusting in the might of a father's tenderness for a free pardon. But on thinking over the business, I remembered what my foster-mother had said about her home at Hauteville, and how hard a thing it would seem to her to leave it. To reveal Everard Lestrange as the seducer of her child would be inevitably to banish her from that simple paradise. Again, the more I dwelt upon the story of that dear soul who was so soon to be my wife, the more morbidly did I shrink from telling it. The knowledge that these things had been was torture to me: as the time drew near, it seemed to me that my lips must needs refuse to shape the words that would reveal them. And thus, after much painful consideration, I hit upon a story which would account satisfactorily for Margery's flight, and yet contain in it very little that should not be true.

Jack Hawker and his wife were seated at supper when the postchaise which had brought me from

Warborough drew up at the cottage. I saw them through the unshrouded casement seated at a little table in the firelit room. My foster-mother rose with a cry of surprise as I opened the door and walked straight into the kitchen, or living-room, where my infancy had been spent. How familiar and how cheery the old open fireplace looked, with a patchwork-covered arm-chair on one side, and an old oaken settle upon which I had been wont to clamber, on the other! There was no light except that of the fire, but the logs were blazing merrily, and I could see every wrinkle in my foster-father's honest rugged countenance.

He rose and stared at me, puzzled for one moment only, recognizing me in the next.

'Wife,' he cried, ''tis Robin—the child you suckled, that turned against us, and stole my darter! Thou'rt a bold villain, Robert Ainsleigh, to show thy face here.'

'Do you remember what I told you more than seven years ago, Jack Hawker?' I answered. 'I told you that I was innocent of wrong to your daughter, and that the day would come that should justify me. Do you think, if I were the villain you call me, that I should come here, having no motive

to serve by coming? I have come to give you back your daughter.'

'What!' he cried, looking towards the door, and with an expression that was half terror, half eagerness, 'have you brought her with you in that coach? I'll not see her, the shameful hussey! I'll not see her. Let her keep out of her father's way. She's wrung my heart sore enough these seven years. I won't be shamed by the sight of her.'

'Not so fast, Jack,' I said; 'Margery is in London, where she is one of the greatest women of the day.'

'How is that?' cried he; 'has some rich fool married her for the love of her pretty face? I've heard of such things, and that the way of shame has been the road to fortune for some women.'

'No, Jack, she has made no rich marriage; she is a widow, and lives by her own industry. When she ran away from here, it was to marry an adventurer—a man called Hay—who died the other day in India, years after he had deserted her—left her to starve.'

'A man called Hay!' cried Mr. Hawker. 'I know of no such fellow. There was never any man of that name within twenty mile of here.'

'I cannot explain that. I only know that your daughter was married to Mr. Philip Hay, and that she has the certificate of her marriage ready to show you, if you cannot believe my word.'

'Believe thee, Robin!' he said, with a touch of his old tenderness, 'there was a time when I loved thee. But who was this Hay, and how came my girl to fall in love with him?'

'The man was an adventurer, as I have told you, and the story is a sad one. Let it rest, for the present at least. Your daughter was legally united to this Mr. Hay, and afterwards deserted in London, where, being alone and penniless, she happened to fall in with a humble friend, who put her into the way of earning an honest living as an actress in a small country theatre.'

'An actress!' cried Jack, amazed; 'do you mean a stage-player? What, John Hawker's daughter strutting in a booth at Bartlemy fair.'

'Not at Bartlemy fair, Jack, but in the grandest theatre in London—Garrick's theatre—where she shines like a queen. Your daughter is a genius, Jack. The noblest women in town would take her by the hand if she would let them. She is honoured and respected by every one who knows her.'

'A genius!' cried Jack, with a bitter laugh. 'That's something genteel, isn't it? But didn't you tell me she's a stage-player?—with a painted face, I'll warrant, like those trollops I've seen at Warborough fair.'

'She is one of the most beautiful as well as the most talented of women,' I answered, 'and I have come here to tell you that she has done me the honour to promise to become my wife.'

'What! you are going to marry her? Is that the end of it? After this cock-and-a-bull story about some Mr. Hay. Come, Robin, wouldn't it be honester to tell thy poor old foster-father the plain truth? Thou didst steal the girl away, and after all these years thou art sorry, and ashamed of thy folly, and wouldst fain make an honest woman of her. Speak the truth, Bob; 'tis the straightest, easiest way.'

'I told you the truth, Jack, that evening at the great house, when you refused to shake hands with me. I had neither act nor part in Margery's running away. Nor have I had any part in her history from that hour until the last two or three months. I have been in India seven years, and have come back an officer in the Company's service, with a

humble fortune of my own winning, which your daughter has generously consented to share with me.'

Jack Hawker rubbed his shaggy head with an air of sore bewilderment.

'Plague take me if I can make it out,' he said; ''tis the queerest story—and yet, Bob, I'm minded to think thou'rt an honest man—and I should like to see the lass thy wife. But a stage-player, with raddled cheeks—that's a hard pill to stomach, Robin;' and the gamekeeper made a wry face, as if the very thought of Margery's profession was nauseous.

'Come to London and see her, Jack,' I said, 'and you'll bow down and worship your own daughter.' And then after a little more talk, and as much explanation as I could venture to give, there came perfect reconciliation. Jack wrung my hands, protesting he had always loved me like a son.

'Ay, Bob, that night I refused thy hand, it went through my heart like a knife,' he said, smiling at me, with tears in his honest eyes. 'What a fine fellow thee art grown, to be sure—as brown as a berry! And thee hast been in India—all among the blacks?'

My foster-mother was delighted. She had stood by crying in her apron while matters seemed doubtful, but fell upon her husband's neck and kissed him when he melted.

'He speaks the truth, Jack,' she said. 'Our girl is as beautiful as an angel, and her heart is as true to us as when she was a babe in her cradle.'

'What!' roared the injured husband, 'hast thee seen her?'

'Yes, Jack, we've managed to meet unbeknown to thee, now and again, on market-days.'

Jack was silent for a few moments, looking downward thoughtfully.

'Well,' he growled at last, 'I'd rather hear you've both deceived me than that she should go on for years and never take the trouble to come anigh us.'

They insisted upon my sitting down to supper with them, and I was in no humour to refuse, and made believe to eat some cold bacon-dumpling, and drink Mr. Hawker's small beer, with as much relish as in the days when this was my home, and to sup with mammy and daddy at nightfall the highest earthly distinction I knew. Jack and his wife asked me innumerable questions about myself, and about my

own adventures, in relating which I took care to avoid all mention of Sir Everard Lestrange. I suffered Jack Hawker even to suppose that I had gone to India of my own free will, from a pure spirit of adventure.

'Thou'lt send away the post-shay, Robin, and lie here for to-night, at least,' said my foster-mother, awakened to the consciousness of my chariot by an impatient snort from one of the horses.

They both pressed me to occupy their second chamber, and having no reason for refusing the friendly offer, I consented, and went out to dismiss the chaise, while my foster-mother went upstairs to light a fire and air the little room, which was not often tenanted.

I paid the postilion, and told him to fetch me in his chaise next day in time for the afternoon coach to London.

'There's no coach leaves Warborough in the afternoon,' he said; 'but there's one at seven in the evening. If I come for you at five, that'll be time enough and to spare.'

He promised to be punctual and then drove away. I turned to go back to the cottage, and as I did so caught sight of a figure lurking behind the elder

bushes that made a tall hedge on one side of the little garden. There was something furtive in the manner of this figure that roused my suspicions. My Indian experiences had made me quick to suspect a spy in any unauthorized loiterer.

'Hullo!' I shouted, 'what do you want there?'

Instead of answering, the man darted round the angle of the hedge and vanished. I followed, but the wood was thick behind Jack Hawker's garden, and the night dark. The man was out of sight.

I stopped at the edge of the wood and listened, but could not hear so much as the crackle of a withered leaf.

'If the scoundrel is a spy, he is used to his work, and does it quietly,' I said to myself; and for the first time I thought of Margery's womanly terrors with something like consideration. Could it be worth Everard Lestrange's while to set a watch on my actions? Surely not; unless he had some special reason for dreading my presence at Hauteville.

Yet it seemed more likely that the figure hiding behind the elder-hedge, so easily scared away at the sound of my voice, was some hungry wretch bent on knocking over half a dozen rabbits, with which vermin the underwood was overrun.

When I went back to my seat beside the hearth, I told Jack Hawker that I had just given chase to a fellow who looked like a poacher.

'Ay,' he said, 'there's plenty of 'em about o' dark nights, such as this; I was out and about with my gun for an hour afore supper, and I shall go out again afore I go to bed; but they're cunning rascals, and it ain't easy to catch 'em.'

I heard a stealthy kind of knock somewhere in the back premises at this moment, and then my foster-mother's voice speaking to some one, who answered her in so low a key that I could catch nothing that was said, except by Mrs. Hawker. She came in presently.

''Twas an impudent pedlar fellow,' she said, 'that wanted me to buy a gown, or a pair of earrings, and then asked if I hadn't a gentleman sleeping here to-night, and how long he was going to stop?'

'A pedlar!' I cried, remembering the man on the coach whose countenance had set my wits to work. 'What was he like?'

'I scarce saw his face, Robin, for I wouldn't let him set his foot inside the door, and it's dark yonder by the dairy. I could just see that he was short and thick-set and had a long beard, that was all.'

'The very man,' said I; and then seeing that my foster-mother was alarmed by my eagerness, I went on: 'a man who travelled by the coach that brought me from London, mother, that's all. Did you tell him how long I was going to stay?'

'He took me so aback, Robin, that I answered him without thinking. I said you were to sleep here to-night, and I hoped many nights, "for he's my dear foster-son," said I, "and I'm as proud of him as if he was my very own." Was there any harm in speaking so free?'

'No harm, mother. The man's face set me thinking, that was all.'

Now that we were all calm, sitting round the fire talking comfortably, Jack Hawker drinking somewhat deeply of that small beer, which did not seem to me provocative of thirst, I asked after my old friend Anthony, and told them that I meant to pay him a visit early next morning.

'Alas! Robin,' my foster-mother said, compassionately, 'if thou wouldst see him again alive, thou hast about come in time, for I hear the old man is very near his end. Betty was here two days ago, and told me that the poor soul has grown quite childish and keeps his bed, and that Mrs. Grimshaw

thinks to be a widow between this and Christmas. 'Twill be a happy release, they all say; and that's a saying I never like to hear, for it sounds as if a sick man's kinsfolk had grown tired of him, and wanted him out of the world.'

Soon after this we separated, and I was ushered into Mrs. Hawker's guest-chamber, a small room with a sloping roof and a casement window—a room which Margery had once occupied, and on the wall whereof her sampler still hung, framed and glazed, as a pendant to a print of the Duke of Marlborough. The little-dimity curtained bed was sweet and pure as a bower of white roses; the patched quilt a marvel of industry, produced by the patient fingers of my foster-mother.

I slept soundly for the first part of the night, worn out by the fatigue of the previous day; but towards daybreak grew restless, and fell a-thinking. Nor were my reflections of an agreeable nature. I was tormented by a feverish eagerness to be astir, although it was not yet light, apprehending that Anthony Grimshaw would die before I could reach Hauteville; and I was now possessed with an unreasonable idea that it was vital for me to see him before he died.

'There is some mystery,' I said to myself,—'some

secret in which I am concerned. I discovered that in Mrs. Grimshaw's face when I was last at Hauteville. There was something more than simple hatred in her expression. How closely she watched Anthony that day! Did she fear that in some interval of sanity he might tell me the secret of the burglary on the night after Lady Barbara's death?'

My opinion of this business had undergone no modification. I still cherished the conviction that this night attack had been planned by Everard Lestrange, and that its object had been the destruction of his step-mother's will. She was well known to have kept her private papers in the Japan cabinet, and to search that cabinet had been evidently the chief business of the wretches who broke into her apartments.

I was dressed and below stairs while my foster-mother, who rose at cock-crow, was still busied with her household duties.

'Why, Robin, are these London hours?' she cried, amazed at seeing me descend the narrow stair; 'I thought you fine folks never left your beds till noon.'

'I am always an early riser, mother, and this morning I was too uneasy to sleep long. After

what you told me last night, I am very anxious to see Mr. Grimshaw. First and foremost, because I loved the man, and would not have him leave this world without a parting hand-clasp; and secondly, because I believe he holds a secret that concerns me, and which, would the light of reason but flicker for a moment across his distraught brain, he might reveal.'

'Nay, Robin, I fear 'tis hopeless to think he will know thy face,' she answered sadly. 'He has not called his wife by her right name for the last six months, I hear.'

She hastened to prepare my breakfast, and was sorely distressed at finding me unable to eat a hearty meal. It was but seven o'clock when I left the cottage to walk to Hauteville, and the autumnal day had all the freshness of early morning—a perfume and a purity that seemed very sweet to me after my long imprisonment in a sick-room, or such airings as a man may get in the suburbs of a great city. The house was quiet and solemn as of old—long lines of close-shuttered windows—a garden neatly kept, but desolate from very emptiness.

On my way I had meditated the probabilities against my obtaining access to my poor old friend, and I decided that the chance of my admittance was

but a slight one. I had got in easily enough upon the last occasion, but then Mrs. Grimshaw had no doubt supposed me safe bestowed in a foreign land —perhaps dead—and had been taken off her guard by my unexpected appearance.

I could hardly hope to surprise her this time. She had in all likelihood given her handmaiden a standing order that I should be refused admittance, let me come when I might.

My forebodings were not realized. Fortune favoured me, or I should say rather, that in a life which had heretofore seemed confused as a tangled skein, the finger of Providence now revealed itself, straightening and unravelling the threads. I began at this time to feel the influence of a stronger Hand than my own leading and directing me to a pre-ordained end.

I rang the bell at the little side-door, in which I had made my entrance and exit so many times in the days of my boyhood—rang it softly, lest I should disturb a scarce awakened household. It was answered quickly, and, to my great satisfaction, by no less a person than that very Mrs. Betty who had so scrubbed and betowelled my youthful countenance. She started at seeing me.

'Lawks a mercy, if it isn't Master Robert!' she cried.

'Yes, Betty, 'tis I. I have come to take leave of my old friend Mr. Grimshaw, before I go away from England, and I hear from Mrs. Hawker that I have not come too soon. He is very ill, she tells me.'

'At death's door, poor soul!' answered Betty, compassionately; 'never did a poor weak creature linger as he has lingered. Did my missus write to bid you come?'

'Mrs. Grimshaw? No; I think she is the last person likely to invite me here.'

'What! don't you know, then?' said Betty, staring.

'Don't I know what?'

'That the old gentleman has been asking for you, and talking of you in his queer rambling way, off and on, ever since he took to his bed this last time. Sure to goodness she'd write and tell you, if she knew where to write.'

'I doubt if she knew my address, Betty, and she might make that an excuse for not writing. Most assuredly she has not written.'

'Ah!' cried the woman, sighing significantly, 'she was always a hard foe to you, and to your

father before you, and I fancy 'twill go hard with her some day, in spite of all her standing up to pray an hour at a stretch at the Chapel in Brewer's Yard.'

'Is she with her husband this morning?'

'No; she's lying down for a few hours' sleep in the room next his. She's been a good wife to him, there's no denying, and has watched day and night till she's pretty near worn out. But it would be better for the poor old man if she put on a pleasanter face while she's about him. Would you like to go to him at once, Master Robert? She'll scold me, I daresay, for taking you to him without her leave, but I'd risk a scolding to make the poor soul happy. He has so fumed and fretted about you of late.'

'Heaven knows that I loved him,' I said, 'for he was one of the best friends I ever had.'

She led me along a dimly-lighted passage, for throughout this vast mansion the daylight was admitted sparingly, up a secondary staircase, to that range of rooms on the second floor which were appropriated to servants, and, on occasion, to visitors of somewhat inferior degree—comfortable chambers enough, but less lofty and spacious than those

below, and furnished with decency rather than splendour, except in some instances where the furniture which had once adorned a state apartment was relegated in its decay to these upper regions.

Betty ushered me into a square room with two windows—a room made gloomy by these relics of former splendour—a tall Elizabethan bedstead of carved walnut-wood, which with age had grown black as ebony—tattered crimson silk hangings—and chairs and tables of the same period; a queer old Flemish commode between two of the windows, provided with innumerable drawers, of all shapes and sizes, elaborately ornamented with carved figures, which might be mythological or angelical, and surmounted by a small square mirror, framed in lacquered metal. There was a dark thick carpet in the centre of the room, a fire burning in the wide grate, and a damask-covered sofa of more modern manufacture than the rest of the furniture, drawn close to the hearth. Beside this sofa I saw a small table with a pile of pamphlets in gray paper, and a large silver watch lying by them. Close to the bed there was another table, crowded with medicine bottles.

The old man was asleep when we entered, but Betty whispered me that he rarely slept more than half an hour at a time. 'And 'tis then but dozing,' she added; 'he is as restless as a teething child.' I stood by the bed-side and looked down at him. Wan and wasted as he had been when I had last seen him, he was much changed for the worse. The face was now but a parchment mask, with sharp pinched features—the hand lying on the counterpane was attenuated to transparency.

The sleeper stirred and murmured in his sleep as I watched him, as if dimly conscious of my presence. Seeing this, and fearful of curtailing his brief slumber, I moved away from the bed softly, and seated myself on the sofa by the fire. The windows were close shut, the fire large, and the atmosphere of the room somewhat oppressive. Betty retired and left me alone with the sick man.

I had not long to wait for his waking. He began presently to move uneasily, with a faint, half-stifled groan at every movement, tossed the bed-clothes impatiently from his shoulders, and finally opened his eyes and gazed at me.

'Roderick!' he quavered, with tremulous accents, 'Roderick, is it you?'

I went to the bedside, and seated myself close to him.

'Nay, dear sir,' I said, bending over him and putting my arm behind his pillow to support the weary head; 'tis not Roderick, but your affectionate pupil, his son. Dear old friend, I am sure thou wilt remember me; and I hear that you have been asking for me of late.'

'Robert,' he gasped, 'Robert! Yes, yes, thy father died. 'Tis thee I have been thinking of. And they told me you were in India. But you have come home—thank God for that!—you have come in time.'

His air to-day seemed reason itself, yet he had clearly no memory of my former visit.

'Come home in time,' he repeated to himself—'home in time. But he'll pass away like the rest—shadows, only shadows. Haven't I seen *her* a thousand times? Barbara!'

No language can describe the tenderness with which he spoke that name, and that one utterance gave rise to a conjecture that I fancy was scarce groundless—the suspicion that in the days long gone, this quiet scholar might have felt something more than a mere servitor's fidelity for his master's daughter.

'I have come here to remain with you as long as you please, sir,' I said; 'I will not quit your bedside.'

He looked at me with so intense an eagerness, so keen a scrutiny, that I fancied he was on the point of making some momentous communication, but in the next minute he broke into a senile laugh, and began to babble in a rambling way about our old studies—asking me if I remembered a doubtful passage in Æschylus which I had once had the temerity to dispute with him.

In this way he went on for upwards of an hour—betimes silent, anon loquacious, but always rambling—and I began to have little hope of ever extorting from him any secret which he might possess concerning my interests, or the mystery of the burglarious attack upon Hauteville.

He was still lying with his head sustained by my arm, in which attitude he seemed to find some comfort, and had sunk into a slumber that was more tranquil than what I had seen of the last, when his wife entered by a door communicating with the next room. She started at sight of me, and her pale face grew a shade paler, but she did not appear to lose her self-possession, and saluted me with her usual repellant air.

'Your servant, Mr. Ainsleigh,' she said; 'I did not suppose that we should be honoured by another visit from you at Hauteville. I fancied you had returned to the Indies, where I should conceive you would find yourself more in your element among a parcel of lawless marauders, than among decent folks here in England.'

'I thank you, madam, for the compliment. The men whom you are pleased to style lawless marauders have obtained for Britain the richest conquest she ever yet achieved; and happy will our country be can she but retain so magnificent a prize.'

'And may I inquire, sir, what motive has brought you here to-day?'

'I have come to see my old friend, your husband, who, I hear, has been asking for me.'

'Who told you that?' she demanded sharply.

'The servant who admitted me.'

'She was mighty officious to babble of my affairs to the first comer. As to my husband's mumbling your name sometimes in his ramblings, Mr. Ainsleigh, I do not consider that a matter of any moment. His poor wandering brain has been busy with all the events of his past life, and could

hardly miss the memory of a pupil who, no doubt, gave him plenty of trouble in his time.'

'By my dulness I may possibly have done so, madam, but by no undutiful act, as you know.'

'Oh, sir, I think you are aware that you were never any especial favourite of mine. I detest a paragon.'

'Ay, madam, your fancies lean rather the other way—to the prodigal son. My father was a favourite of yours, until he offended you.'

Martha Grimshaw's face flamed scarlet in a moment, and then grew almost livid with stifled fury.

'Your father was a villain, sir! and I doubt not you are as like him in mind as you are in person. And now, sir, since you have gratified your affection, or your curiosity, by the contemplation of this poor object, my sick husband, you will, I hope, favour me by taking your leave.'

'I have no intention of departing just yet, Mrs. Grimshaw,' I answered coolly. 'Your husband seems pleased with my presence, and it would need even more discouragement than you can offer to drive me from him.

'My husband!' she cried scornfully, 'do you suppose he knows one person from another?'

'He has recognized me, Mrs. Grimshaw, and has talked for some time of the days of my tutelage.'

She stared at me with an angry yet baffled look, and for some moments seemed at a loss.

'I wonder, Mr. Ainsleigh,' she said at last, 'you can be so mean-spirited as to remain in a house where you know you are not welcome. Do you think Sir Everard Lestrange would permit you to cross his threshold, were he at hand to prevent it?'

'I much doubt his power to hinder me, madam, were he here to make the attempt. And his ownership of this house is a fact of which I am also doubtful.'

She looked at me this time with a gaze more malignant than any she had yet cast upon me, but fear was mingled with that malignity, and I felt more than ever assured that she had some reason for dreading my presence in this place, and more than ever resolved to remain.

Unfriendly as our colloquy had been, we had spoken in tones so measured that the sleeper had not been disturbed by our voices. He slumbered on heavily, and with laboured breathing, still rest-

ing on my arm. Mrs. Grimshaw contemplated us both for some moments in silence, and then withdrew to her sofa, where she soon appeared to become absorbed in the perusal of one of those gray-paper covered pamphlets, which, I doubted not, contained the pious lucubrations of some favourite teacher.

From this time her manner to me underwent a complete change. She now became ceremoniously polite, offered me refreshment, and begged me to remain as long as I was inclined.

'I hope I have profited better by the monitions of my minister than to cherish animosity,' she began, looking up from her book by-and-by, when her husband had been awake some time, and rambling on childishly, with his hand in mine, 'even against one who has ever treated me with contumely. I was angry with my servant for admitting you to this room, because I do not like that sad spectacle of human weakness to be exhibited to any eyes but my own and the doctor's. Yet, since you are here in spite of me, Mr. Ainsleigh, I have no desire to be otherwise than civil.'

'Your civility comes rather late, madam,' said I, 'but it is not the less welcome on that account.'

The doctor came in presently—a mere village practitioner, who had attended me years ago in childish fevers and surfeits. He did not recognize me at once, but went straight to his patient, and began the usual formula. He made minute inquiries as to the due administration of various draughts, boluses, blisters, and other medicaments which he had supplied, and which seemed so numerous that I could but wonder the victim had survived the torments of such a system.

'Upon my word, Mrs. Grimshaw,' he exclaimed at last, 'I think our patient has rallied a little; the eye is a trifle brighter—the pulse a thought stronger. Not that I would hold out any hope of permanent improvement. No, madam, at your husband's age, and with his infirmities, to speak of hope would be but to delude.'

'He has a hope superior to any that you can give him, I trust, Mr. Hender,' Mrs. Grimshaw answered severely,—'the hope that his sins, which are as scarlet——'

'Undoubtedly, my dear madam,' exclaimed Mr. Hender, cutting short any intended disquisition by the readiness of his acquiescence,—'unquestionably, madam; but, as I remarked before, our patient is

somewhat brighter this morning. That decoction of camomile with conserve of roses had no doubt a soothing and invigorating effect; and the electuary I think has been beneficial.'

The doctor lingered a little, glancing at me suspiciously.

'And—ahem—is this gentleman a member of our learned profession, madam?' he inquired.

'No, Mr. Hender, I have not that honour—but I have had the gratification of being your patient; and I think I can recall the very flavour of that camomile and conserve of roses you speak of.'

'What! sir, have I ever prescribed for you?'

'More than once, sir. You steered me safely through the dangers of a scarlet fever, about fifteen years ago. My name is Ainsleigh.'

'What! Master Robert—the little lad that noble creature Lady Barbara Lestrange adopted? You astound me. Why, then, I doubt not 'tis your coming has revived our old friend—for he has done nothing but rave about you.'

Mrs. Grimshaw bit her lip impatiently, but was silent. I followed the doctor into the corridor, and asked him to tell me frankly whether his patient was likely to last much longer, and whether any relief or

comfort could be afforded him by the advice of a London physician.

'I do not for an instant question your ability, Mr. Hender,' I said; 'and I know that you have had ample experience among your rustic patients. But there is sometimes a kind of satisfaction in having recourse to the highest advice.'

Mr. Hender shrugged his shoulders.

'Assemble the whole College of Physicians, my dear sir, and they can do no more for this poor old ruin than I have done. He received his death-blow from the ruffians who broke into this house years ago. He has lingered years instead of months, and it is to my mind a miracle that he has lasted so long. As to the end, sir, I cannot tell you to an hour when that may be, but the thread of life is worn very thin. It must speedily snap.'

I thanked him for his candour, and went back to the bedside, determined to stop till the end, let it come when it might.

Throughout the dull autumn day Mrs. Grimshaw and I kept watch in the sick-chamber—she on her sofa by the fire, sitting bolt upright, sometimes reading, sometimes working, with a needle that

moved with a monotonous click, and kept as good time as the ticking of the eight-day clock in the corridor outside. So idle were my thoughts sometimes during the slow silent hours, that I must needs take notice of the fact that Mrs. Grimshaw's thread never by any chance became entangled, but moved with the smoothness and precision of clockwork. How different a picture was this stern automatonical figure from Margery at work, as I had often seen her of late, the bright face bent over the embroidery frame, a heap of rainbow-hued silks scattered about, and the colour she wanted always missing; and then what pretty impatience and fuming and exclaiming, and what impossible knots to be disentangled with my aid! And from this agreeable vision my vagabond fancy flew to another—on which, alas! it dwelt much longer—the fair pale face of Dorothea Hemsley, as I had seen it so often in that house, looking up at me ever and anon as I read aloud to the two ladies in my benefactress's morning-room. Ah! sweet face, should I ever see thee again? Had I not forfeited even the right to remember, as well as the right to hope?

The old man was very quiet, talked rarely, and took his medicines and nourishment with a mechanical

patience that seemed the result of long habit. He gave a weary sigh now and then, as of one who wondered why he must be troubled so often, to so little purpose, but submitted always. That my presence was agreeable, and in some manner comforting to him, I had ample evidence. After every brief slumber—and he spent the whole day in alternate snatches of waking and sleeping—he appeared to have forgotten the fact of my presence, and recognized me always with the same expression of pleased surprise.

'Robert Ainsleigh,' he would say, smiling at me—'my pupil Robert! They told me he was dead—nay, that was Roderick—'twas Roderick that died! Robert, my old pupil!'

Then, after a long pause, and a little unintelligible murmuring, he would fancy we were at our studies, and exclaim,—

'Come, let us begin, Robert; open your Virgil, boy. The second book,' and would anon proceed to quote the Æneid, in his poor feeble tones, but with infinite gusto.

At another time he would begin the conjugation of a Greek or Latin verb, and wander for half an hour at a stretch in a maze of tenses.

'That I should live to forget the pluperfect of,' he would exclaim, hopelessly.

So the day crept on, and waned, without his having been visited by one glimmer of reason, save that which had inspired me with hope at my first coming. He lay with his hand in mine, and smiled at me affectionately, but all his talk was in shreds and patches, and of the daily studies of my boyhood. He never referred to my departure from Hauteville, or to any event that had happened since I left. Every time that he awoke and recognized me, he urged me to remain with him, in a piteous manner, that went to my heart.

'You'll not melt away as all the rest do?' he cried. 'I've seen all that I love best in this room; but when I speak to them they vanish, and leave me alone with her.'

He pointed at his wife as he spoke, and then bringing his face nearer mine, whispered,—

'Who is she? I don't know her. Why does she sit there always, stitching my shroud? It's nearly finished, isn't it? Heaven knows, I'm ready for it, Robert.'

In spite of his rambling talk, there was at times such a reasonable air about him, that I felt much

inclined to test him by direct interrogation upon the subject of the burglary. I could not attempt this, however, while Mrs. Grimshaw remained in the room, and I cherished the hope that she would, sooner or later, be compelled to leave us together.

This devoutly-wished consummation did not occur. The lady held her ground with a calm persistency which showed me she had no intention to give me the opportunity I desired. She was monstrously civil, ordered a dinner to be served for me in her sitting-room on the ground-floor, whither I was conducted by Mrs. Betty, who waited upon me during the meal, and was infinitely loquacious, but had evidently nothing of importance to communicate. Had she been acquainted with any of the secrets of that house, her mistress would doubtless have been too wise to trust us together.

'You will return to your friends the Hawkers at nightfall, I suppose, sir?' Mrs. Grimshaw said to me when it was growing dusk.

'Nay, madam,' I replied, 'if you have no objection, I should much prefer to remain here all night, and share your watch; or, if you please, relieve you from the necessity of watching. From what Mr.

Hender has said, I can but infer that your poor husband is very near his end, and, if possible, I would be with him at the last.'

'You are vastly affectionate, sir,' she exclaimed, controlling her temper with an evident effort, 'and since you came uninvited, I suppose you must stay uninvited. Sure, 'tis all of a piece!'

After this speech she remained for some time absorbed in thought, and then became even more civil than she had been before, inviting me to take a dish of tea with her.

I watched all that night, and Martha Grimshaw with me. In those long dead hours of the night the patient slept much less than in the day, and was infinitely more restless. It was weary work to nurse and soothe him—weary to see his weariness; but for me it was a labour of love, and so that night passed, and another gray autumnal morning glimmered with a chilly light between the drawn curtains of the sick-chamber. I had some idea of going back to Jack Hawker's cottage for a few hours in the course of the day, but, on reflection, resolved to hold my ground where I was. How could I be sure of readmittance should I be so imprudent as to trust myself outside the doors of Hauteville? I wrote to

Margery, therefore, telling her that my return was uncertain, and explaining the cause of my detention, and entrusted my letter to Mrs. Betty for conveyance to the Warborough post-office. Mr. Hender came at noon, and pronounced his patient considerably enfeebled by a restless night.

'The poor soul cannot last much longer, Mrs. Grimshaw,' he said; 'and I am sure, madam, as the end approaches, you must derive a profound satisfaction from the consciousness that you have performed your duty in so admirable a manner.'

Mrs. Grimshaw bowed, and acknowledged the doctor's compliment with a frosty smile.

'You are very good to say as much, sir; I have endeavoured to fulfil my obligations in a Christian spirit.'

'And have succeeded, madam—have succeeded to a degree that sheds lustre upon your sex.'

For three days and three nights we watched, and in all that time Mrs. Grimshaw never left me alone with her patient; for when she did retire to snatch an hour's rest, which was a rare occurrence, she left a strange maid-servant on guard with me, and I had thus no opportunity of attempting to elicit some ray of memory from the sick man's mind.

For three days and three nights I sat beside my old friend's bed, and smoothed his pillow, and helped to administer his medicines; and still there was no change, or a change so subtle that I could not trace its progress. The hours were very long in the monotonous silence of that gloomy chamber, and it was only with difficulty that I could realize the fact that I had spent the smaller half of a week only at Hauteville. I began to think that the period of my watch might stretch out indefinitely, and that it might be months before I should be free to quit that strange seclusion. To my surprise, Mrs. Grimshaw became hourly more civil. She was even so far mollified as to converse with me over our dish of tea; and was good enough to inform me that her husband had made his will a year before the burglary, and had bequeathed to her the entire sum of his accumulations.

'He has been a miser all his life,' she said. 'He has received good wages and spent nothing. His wages ceased, of course, after the burglary, from which time he has been only a pensioner on Sir Everard's bounty. But that worthy gentleman has been so good as to allow him a pension of fifty pounds a year, besides the privilege of a comfortable home in this place.'

'I should hardly have given Sir Everard Lestrange credit for so much generosity,' I remarked.

'Nay, sir, we know that you were never a lover of the gentleman.'

'Has the estate been without a steward since your poor husband's affliction?' I inquired.

'There has been no house-steward, but accounts are paid and rents collected by Mr. Nixon, the lawyer, of Warborough.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED ALLY.

It was on the fourth evening of my residence at Hauteville, and I sat musing before the fire, gazing into the cavernous depths of burning coal as if I would fain have read my destiny there. 'Twas nightfall, and the rooks, whose harsh voices I knew so well in my boyhood, were clamouring hoarsely as they flew home to their ragged nests in the tall elms across the ha-ha. Mrs. Grimshaw had gone to lie down for an hour in the adjoining chamber, leaving the door between the two rooms ajar, so that I knew not whether she might be sleeping, or lying awake to listen to anything that might be said or done in the sick-room. The day had been dull, but the sun had set redly, and a blood-red streak lingered on the horizon when I last looked wistfully out at the evening sky. The windows had blackened since then with the deepening night, and there was now no light in the room but

the red glow of the fire. The tall bedstead, with its wine-dark hangings, the quaintly carved commode between the windows, and all the ponderous antique furniture of the room had a somewhat weird look in this light, and I could but think of those German legends I had read of a penniless wanderer who, for hope of reward, volunteers to pass the night in the chief bed-chamber of a haunted castle. Here, alas! there was something more real than ghost or goblin —there was the swift approaching shadow of death.

I was not alone with the sick man. Hester Grubb, the maid-servant, was seated at a respectful distance, with her arms folded primly, and her gooseberry-coloured eyes fixed upon me. She was a damsel of the sanctimonious school, a devout disciple of the saint in Brewer's Yard, and seemed to be more favoured by her mistress than my old acquaintance Mrs. Betty. I had not the slightest doubt she was set as a watch over me; and this extreme carefulness on the part of Mrs. Grimshaw went far to confirm me in the conviction that the dying man was the repository of some secret which it behoved me to discover.

'Alas! how speedily will those lips be sealed,' I thought, as I glanced towards the wan face lying on

the pillow, with closed eyelids; 'how soon will that feeble voice be dumb, and then whatever wrong he might help to set right will remain immutable.'

I was sorely tired this evening, as I sat gazing into the fire. My protracted watch had well-nigh worn out spirit and body together. The hope which, as well as my affection for this poor old man, had brought me to Hauteville was fast expiring. Even my own future, which had seemed fair enough to me in London by the light of Margery's smile, wore now a dark and doubtful aspect; nor did I struggle against the despondent fit that oppressed me. On the contrary, I abandoned myself to these gloomy fancies, and sat brooding upon my perplexities until sleep came to my relief. My eyes closed in despite of my endeavours to keep them open, and I passed at once into that mystic world which we enter so swiftly, and which is yet so remote from the scene of our waking life.

How or why I should have dreamt as I did dream that evening I know not—whether by some occult magnetic influence, which only the student of the dark science believes in, or by the mere accident of a dreamer's fancy. I have tried often to explain this thing to myself, but have

failed entirely, and can only place the fact on record as a curious episode in my life. I only know that, although all my thoughts were concentrated upon Hauteville and its inmates, I had no sooner closed my eyes than I was in India, at Plassey, fighting over again that skirmish with the Frenchmen guarding the tank. The vision was singularly vivid. I felt the burning sun beating down upon my uncovered head—heard the clash and clamour of war—saw the intense blue sky, the flashing river, the pomp and splendour of the Moorish host, and, above all, a face glaring down upon me that was like my own—the face of the man with whom I was grappling, hand to hand, on the steep slippery bank.

We had closed in what seemed a death-struggle, and I had my sword at his breast, when an awful voice, issuing from I know not whence, cried out, 'Stay, wretch! would you murder your father?'

I woke with a start at that terrible address; or, it may be, awakened by the sound of a knocking at the door of the sick-chamber. I started to my feet, full of a strange fear, went hurriedly to the door, opened it, and found myself face to face with my father.

It was the very countenance I had seen in my dream, but not as in that vision, convulsed with

anger. It looked at me with a grave and quiet smile.

'Why, Robert, you gaze as if at sight of a ghost. Is it so strange a thing for adventurers who met yesterday in Hindostan to meet to-day in England? I told you when we parted, that the wind which tosses such a waif as I hither and thither, just as it scatters the leaves of the forest, might blow me your way sooner or later. Come, child, are you going to swoon, that you turn so white?'

'Nay, sir, 'twere a womanish thing to swoon, but the surprise—the pleasure——!'

'Is it verily a pleasure, Robert, to see thine outcast father?'

'Indeed, sir, I can imagine few higher pleasures.'

We were standing in the corridor outside Mr. Grimshaw's bedchamber, honest Betty a few paces off, candle in hand, staring at us.

'Lord knows what my mistress will do to me for letting the gentleman in,' she ejaculated, 'but he said he wanted to see you, Master Robert, and that he must speak to Mr. Grimshaw before he died, and was so pressing that I could not say him nay. And if my mistress should be furious—as

it's likely she will be when she finds a stranger here—you'll please tell her, Master Robert, 'twas no fault of mine.'

With which speech Mrs. Betty washed her hands of the business and retired, leaving us in the dark.

'What brought you to England, sir?' I asked, as I clasped my father's hands in both of mine, 'and to this house?'

'I can best answer like the fellow in the play,' he replied, in that agreeably careless manner which I remembered so well—the manner of one who has indeed been like a leaf tossed about by every wind that blows. 'A truant disposition, good, my lord.' I was sick of a fever after we parted company at Muxadavad, and being incapacitated for war, was sent back to France with a party of wretches as decrepit as myself. On my recovery, they transferred me to a regiment serving at home, and I was quartered at Havre, where I have dawdled away half a year or so pleasantly enough in garrison. Many and many a time have I thought of thee, Bob—thou wouldst scarce believe with what tenderness and longing—until at last the yearning of my foolish heart for thee grew so strong, that I, who

have rarely asked a favour from my superiors, must needs turn beggar, and supplicate for a month's leave of absence. I came to London, after being sorely beaten about between Havre and Southampton, went straight to Mr. Swinfen, whose clerk gave me your address in the Temple. At your chambers I could discover nothing, but that a lady lodging in Surry Street would be best able to give me information of your movements. I went thereupon to the lady in Surry Street—a most gracious and lovely creature—who told me where to find you, and by every glance and tone unconsciously revealed that you are the object of her supreme tenderness.'

'That lady is to be my wife, sir,' I said gravely.

'Indeed! that hardly jumps with the story you told me when we were together at Muxadavad.'

I felt the hot blood in my checks at this home-thrust. I had, indeed, hinted at my passion for Dora in my confidences to my father.

'Nay, sir,' I faltered, 'there are events which turn the whole current of a man's life. I owe so vast a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Hunter, that the devotion of all my future years will but poorly balance it.'

'Say thou art inconstant, Bob, and I am content,' exclaimed my father hastily. 'Mrs. Hunter is a fair excuse for a man to change his mind, especially when his first fancy is cut short by the *cul de sac* of matrimony; but, for God's sake, talk not of gratitude. I would not have thee marry like thy father. Yet think not I would malign the dead. Thy mother was the fondest and truest of women, and might have made a better man happy, but there were hours in which I almost hated her, because she was not that other one.'

We were still standing in the embrasure of the door, talking in an undertone. I was glad to cut the conversation short at this stage, for it had grown more painful than I can express. Instead, therefore, of replying to this last speech of my father's, I opened the door softly and peeped into the sick-room.

The old man was still asleep; the servant had lighted a candle, and was seated by it, reading a pious book, after the exact image of her mistress.

'Would you like to see him?' I asked my father in a whisper.

'Poor old Tony? Ay, Bob, 'twas that desire which in part brought me here, since I could have waited

easily for your return to London—that, and a vague foolish wish to look upon the scene of my youth with these world-weary eyes. Is he so very ill?'

'He lives—that is as much as any one can say.'

'Poor soul! I think I had influence over him once. I know that he loved me, and bore with my wayward humours with a sublime patience. If such a man as I could go to heaven, Bob, what a long score he would have to settle with old friends when he got there. We are sorry for our misdeeds when those we sinned against are passed beyond the sight of our penitence. God grant us a day of reckoning in a better world, and that we may be forgiven!'

We went softly into the room—the maid dropped her book, and stared at my companion with open mouth. I believe she took him for a strange doctor. She slipped out of the room as soon as she recovered her senses, doubtless to acquaint her mistress with what was taking place. I laid my hand upon my father's arm as he was going towards the bed.

'Remember, sir,' I whispered, 'this poor soul

believes you dead. May not your sudden appearance prove a fatal shock to one in his weak state?'

'Nay, child, from what the woman said who admitted me, I supposed him past all capability of recognition, and that one face was the same to him as another.'

'You are wrong, sir. He knew my face—mistaking it at first for yours, I admit, but speedily perceiving who I was.'

'He took you for me, and the shock was not fatal, you see,' said my father. 'He has therefore doubtless forgotten the fact of my supposed death.'

'I scarce know how much he forgets or remembers,' I replied; 'his brain is in a strange confusion. Yet there are gleams of light, and I have been waiting in the hope that before the end his mind would clear, and I should discover——'

'What?'

'The fate of Lady Barbara's will.'

The old man opened his eyes as I spoke those words.

'Yes,' he cried, with a shrill voice which was louder than I had heard from him yet, 'Lady Barbara's will—that was the name of the paper.'

My father took the candle from the table,

and stood with the light shining full upon his face.

'Tony,' he said, with an expression that was at once grave and tender, 'do you remember me?'

'Remember thee?' exclaimed the old man, with a little hysterical laugh. 'The lad I taught thirty years ago! My wilful, foolish, brilliant boy, Roderick! Remember thee? When I lie dumb in my grave I shall still remember thee—or death is something worse than I take it to be. They said thou wert dead years ago—but I knew better. The old man knew better than those Job's comforters. Oh, Roderick! Roderick! why didst thou stop away so long? Villainous things have been done behind thy back.'

His manner was singularly rational—every word clearly spoken—though in a voice that was very feeble. It seemed to me that the moment for which I had prayed and waited had now arrived, and that the light of reason was rekindled in this clouded brain.

My father seated himself as I had done, by the bedside, and took the old man's wasted hand in his.

'Dear old Tony,' he said softly, 'be calm, I be-

seech thee. 'Tis sweet to be welcomed so lovingly; and Heaven knows I but ill deserved thine affection.'

'Nay, child, thou wert the pride of my heart. Sure thou hadst a natural genius for the exact sciences—and wert a very pretty hand at the classics. Hast thou forgotten all I taught thee by this time?'

'Upon my soul, Tony, I believe I have achieved wonders in the way of forgetfulness. But I found my knowledge of mathematics uncommonly useful now and then in solving an engineering difficulty—as some of the gentlemen I have lived amongst could tell you, were they at hand to speak for me.'

'A natural genius!' the old man repeated, suddenly relapsing into his accustomed semi-childish manner. 'The mathematician is born, not made—a natural genius!' and then, after a pause, he continued in the same dreaming tone, 'Lady Barbara's will—Lady Barbara's will—ay, that was the paper—who says Tony was unfaithful? Let them strike! I'm only an old man. They shall never know. Tony Grimshaw will die sooner than let them know.'

I looked at my father, and he at me significantly. We seemed on the threshold of a revelation, and yet might be as far away from it as ever. 'Twas vain to dream of forcing the old man's memory by interrogation. The expiring mind was like a marsh fire, now flashing bright, now vanishing in darkness. We could but watch, and be patient.

While the old man lay muttering, the door between the two rooms was flung suddenly open, and Mrs. Grimshaw flounced in upon us in a tantrum. Now, I had been so engrossed by the consideration of what effect my father's appearance might have upon poor old Anthony, that I had not for a moment foreseen the shock which this resurrection from the grave might inflict upon Anthony's wife.

She came forward to me with anger in every lineament.

'I am astounded, sir!' she exclaimed, 'that you should have the impertinence to summon a strange doctor without even paying me the compliment to ask my leave. But it matches with your general conduct, and I ought hardly to be surprised.'

'This gentleman is no doctor, madam,' I replied; 'but an old acquaintance of yours.'

She had until this moment looked only at me. She

now glanced towards my father, at once recognized him, and with a scream that rang through the chamber, sank swooning into a chair.

I called her maid, who performed the usual offices, and speedily brought the lady to her senses. She opened her eyes, and after gazing round about her for some moments in a half-bewildered way, she appeared to recover her recollection.

'You do well, sir,' she said, looking at my father with a suppressed fire of hate and vengeance in her eyes,—'you do well to rise from the dead in order to scare an honest woman, whose greatest happiness was to have forgotten you.'

'Madam,' replied my father, calmly, 'I doubt not that your guilty conscience, which must needs have accused you of the numerous injuries you did me, when you had the ear of your mistress, was best comforted by forgetfulness. You perceive, however, that some ghosts are not easily laid.'

The panic-stricken wretch tried to falter an insolent answer, but could say nothing. Her lips trembled mutely; she looked at my father for some moments with a strange expression, and then burst into a flood of tears. They were the first I had ever seen her shed, nor could I have believed her

stern nature capable of such profound emotion as that which now convulsed her frame.

For some minutes she abandoned herself to that passion of weeping, then rose and rushed from the room, exclaiming in half-stifled accents,—

'I loved you, Roderick—I loved you!'

My father shrugged his shoulders, with a little bitter laugh.

'A pretty confession, truly!' he exclaimed. 'Do you know, Bob, I believe that woman to have been the bane of my life? She was insidious as Satan himself, and was always at my mistress's elbow, ready to whisper away my credit. But for her we should never have quarrelled; but for her we should never have parted. And now that my life is broken, and Barbara is in her grave, she pleads her passion for me as an excuse for having compassed my destruction. And as I am a gentleman, Robert, I never said her a word but in the merest every-day civility, though I have bribed her with many a guinea. Why, she was the plainest woman in Berkshire, and had about as much figure as the village maypole!'

I could but marvel at that habitual carelessness of my father's disposition, which made him speak

lightly even of this business, which had involved such serious issues.

The old man had been awake during this scene, and had gazed upon his wife's emotion with a countenance full of wonder and alarm. When she had vanished, slamming the door behind us, he exclaimed, in a senile tone,—

'A clever woman—a very remarkable woman—but she has her temper!'

He repeated this sentence several times, and at last dropped off to sleep in the act of mumbling it.

My father and I were now, to all intents and purposes, alone. The maid had followed her mistress, nor did either return during the rest of that evening. It seemed that, upon my father's appearance, all discipline was abandoned. Mrs. Betty, who brought us our tea, informed me that Mrs. Grimshaw was in strong hysterics, and that Hester Grubb was drenching her with brandy and salt—at this time a popular remedy for almost all the ills which flesh is heir to.

Being thus left in complete possession of the sick-chamber, I took upon myself the duties of nurse, with some slight assistance from Mrs. Betty, who brought me the broths and messes which the invalid took at stated intervals. He slept considerably this

evening, and seemed to rest more quietly than before my father's coming. It might have been that the agitation attendant on such a recognition had exhausted his weak spirits; or it might have been that he had a vague satisfaction and comfort in the presence of his first and favourite pupil.

My father and I talked long. I had much to tell him of my adventures since we parted company in India, and I told him everything with perfect unreserve—except, indeed, when I came to the story of my offer to Margery, of which I gave him but a sketch.

He was warmly interested in my affairs, and much struck by my relation of my interview with Mrs. Winbolt, the milliner in Long Acre.

'Why, then, Barbara did verily make a will!' he exclaimed; 'and, by her manner of making it, we may fairly surmise it was in your favour, but was doubtless destroyed by those who found it after her death.'

'Yes, sir; and be sure it was for that purpose this house was broken into the night after she died, and before the seals could be attached to her effects. That very cabinet which the intruders destroyed was the receptacle in which she kept her private papers.

You will remember that, as I have just informed you, she was down here a week before her death. Who can doubt that, in that time, she put away her will, and that 'twas known or suspected she had done so? Rely upon it, there were spies in her husband's household to acquaint him with her smallest movements.'

'Do you imagine Sir Marcus Lestrange capable of so great a villainy?'

'I know very little of Sir Marcus, save that he turned me out of doors on the strength of a groundless accusation; but I know Everard Lestrange to be apt at iniquity, and I have, from the very outset—even before I had heard Mrs. Winbolt's story—given him credit for being the author of the attack on yonder poor old man, either in his own person or by the hands of his agents.'

'Hardly in his own person, I should think,' said my father, musing; 'that would have been too hazardous. But it certainly seems scarcely reasonable that Barbara should have made a will, and died intestate three weeks after making it. She was not the woman to be fickle or frivolous.'

'Indeed, no, sir; and I can hardly conceive that, after the warm interest she had ever evinced in my

welfare, and with her knowledge of the wrong that had been done me, she would leave me no pittance out of her wealth. I care but little for the loss of fortune; my future life is to be that of a soldier —without thought of the morrow; but it goes against me that a villain should continue to prosper.'

My father shrugged his shoulders, after his foreign fashion.

'"Tis a world in which villainy is apt to be prosperous,' he said.

The night grew late; and, at last, even in my father's agreeable company, I began to feel that sense of weariness, against which I had struggled so long, creeping over me. I stifled several yawns, dropped asleep more than once in the midst of a sentence, and, by various other signs, betrayed my condition.

'How long have you been watching, Bob?' my father asked, by-and-by.

'This is the fifth night.'

'Then why, in Heaven's name, didst thou not tell me so at first, thou victim of friendship? Lie down on that sofa, and take a good night's rest, while I perform your duties by the sick-bed. I slept soundly

last night, and dozed away half the day in the stage-coach that brought me to Warborough.'

I consented somewhat reluctantly, after giving my companion careful instructions about the medicines and broths to be administered during the rest of the night.

'You'll awaken me, if he should grow worse?' I said.

'Ay, Bob; but I know the signs of approaching death well enough to be sure that the end is not so near as you fancy. You may take a night's rest without fear. Poor old Tony's pulse is stronger than when I first touched his wrist.'

He was standing by the bed, looking down at the old man, who was sleeping more peacefully than I had seen him sleep since my coming.

'One would suppose he was renovated by your presence,' I said.

'Who can tell what he feels? I told you I always had influence over him—could lead him by the nose, my uncle said. My uncle'—he repeated in an altered voice—'how strange that name seems! It wounded me like the thrust of a dagger just now when I spoke it carelessly, unawares. 'Twas in this house we parted with bitterness and anger. And I

never to see his face again! O God, how careless youth is! I thought of nothing but my own wrongs—not of his pain—although he had been a second father to me. Do you not wonder how I have endured life, Robert, with so many sins upon my head? But I have lived on, you see, and carried my burden. Is there such an exquisite pleasure in eating, drinking, and sleeping, that a man should live for those when all else has been taken from him?'

'Nay, sir,' I said, 'I venture to think that Providence has meant kindly to us both in bringing us together after so many years of severance, and that in the affection of your only son you may perchance find some recompense for the loss of those you loved in the past.'

'In the past—in the present—in the future, Robert,' he cried in his wild manner. 'I shall adore my cousin Barbara till I am clay. And then turning to me, with a graver aspect, he asked,—

'And dost thou verily love me, Bob—the father to whom thou dost not owe one single benefit?'

'Fate willed it so, sir, but I love you with all my heart.'

After this I lay down upon Mrs. Grimshaw's sofa,

and suffered my father to cover me with his riding-coat. I lay for some minutes gazing upon him dreamily as he sat in a capacious arm-chair by the bed, and then sleep stole upon my wearied brain—oh! so sweetly.

This time my dreams were of the vaguest—dreams which I have never been able to recall, but I know that the living and the dead were with me—now Lady Barbara, now Dora, anon Margery, and that many shifting scenes passed before me. After these confused visions there followed, I think, a slumber that was dreamless, for, on awakening suddenly at some slight sound in the room, I seemed to emerge from a world of empty darkness. The fire had burnt low, a glimmer of the cold day-light was creeping in through the aperture left by an ill-closed curtain, one of the candles had gone out, and the other shed a sickly uncertain light by which I could at first scarce distinguish objects in the chamber. I looked across to the bed,—my father was still seated at his post, but was sleeping soundly. The bed was empty. I started to my feet with a faint cry of alarm, and, turning round, beheld Anthony Grimshaw on his knees before the old Flemish commode, which I have described in

these pages—a weird shrunken figure, with naked legs and feet—a figure which Mr. Hogarth might have painted.

The lighted candle stood on the top of the commode, and the old man was busily groping among the numerous small drawers and cupboards and curious hiding-places with which this ancient piece of cabinet-work was superabundantly supplied.

My first impulse was to carry him back to bed, but presently wonder and curiosity transfixed me, and I stood motionless watching him and listening to him.

He was muttering to himself as he groped and fumbled, 'Lady Barbara's will—yes, yes—that was the document. "Into your hands, my faithful Anthony—into your hands. I would rather trust you than those around me. I commit this paper into your hands, and when the time comes you will produce it." But the time is not come. She is not dead yet—no, no, thank God—she is not dead!'

These sentences he mumbled in snatches, opening and shutting the loose old drawers and cupboards with feeble tremulous hands while he talked.

But presently his manner changed. He gave

a little shrill cry and exclaimed, with clasped hands,—

'I would sooner sell you my life, gentlemen, than that paper!'

Then came a senile laugh—

'And at the last I cheated them!'

His head was now pushed into the centre cupboard, which was larger than the rest. I heard him pull out an inner drawer, which flew back a moment afterwards with a clicking sound, and he emerged with a folded paper packet in his hand. It was a packet secured by three large seals.

He crept back to his bed on all-fours, with the packet held between his teeth. I saw that he was unconscious of my presence, and feared to startle him by any offer of assistance. He gave a feeble groan when he got into bed, but seemed altogether stronger than I could have supposed possible, after so long a confinement. The packet he disposed of under his pillow, and in a few minutes had sunk into a quiet slumber, exhausted no doubt by this supreme effort.

My heart beat fast and furiously. Could that packet indeed contain the missing will? The old man's words implied as much. And yet

how should his disordered brain distinguish one document from another? That which he had been groping for might be the will, but the paper he had found might be any unimportant parcel, laid aside and forgotten. Was it likely that the real thing could have lain hidden in that Flemish commode all this time, undiscovered by the lynx eyes of Mrs. Grimshaw?

Yet how complete a story had been told, to my mind, by those incoherent sentences. A trust conveyed, and accepted. An attack upon an old servant's fidelity. Resistance to the very death: and the villains baffled at last by that dogged honesty, departing with their errand unfulfilled.

These thoughts flashed through my mind with lightning swiftness.

I did not stand upon punctilio as to the manner of satisfying my doubts, but knelt down by the bed, and softly drew away the packet from beneath the sleeper's pillow. With a trembling hand I tore open the seals, but I swear that it was a just revenge, and not avarice, that made me so eager.

'To my dear first cousin, once removed, Robert Ainsleigh, only son of my cousin Roderick Ainsleigh, who died at Soho, in the year 1731, I bequeath

the whole of my real estate, including Hauteville House and Park, and all lands, tenements, and hereditaments appertaining thereto, subject only to the conditions of my marriage settlement, which gives a life interest in the same to my husband, Sir Marcus Lestrange,' and so on, and so on, through all the customary legal jargon went the will which made me master of Hauteville.

My father awoke while I was still poring over this paper. I handed it to him without a word. He read it slowly through, from the first line to the last.

'Thou wert right, Robert, in thy surmises,' he exclaimed, when he had finished his careful perusal, 'and Everard Lestrange has been squandering your wealth, and lording it as master of your manor ever since his father's death. Poor old Tony must have hidden the will, intending to produce it at the proper moment; and those scoundrels who, no doubt, made their attack before the faithful creature had received tidings of his mistress's death, failed in their mission. 'Twas most likely their fury at being baffled that made them use him so ill. Well, Bob, the will is a good will, I take it, late as it comes to hand, and thou art master of Hauteville.'

'Twere idle to say that I did not feel a certain pride and rapture in the idea thus presented to my mind. I had affirmed no more than the truth when I said that I cared little for fortune; but I did care for Hauteville, and I did languish for revenge upon the wretch whose malice had blighted my life.

And yet how could I touch Everard Lestrange without injury to Everard Lestrange's wife? In thought and feeling, in all that makes marriage sweet and sacred, those two might be as far apart as Africa and the Himalayas; but in fortune, reputation, and in the sight of the world, they were united. To brand him as a scoundrel, would be to bring disgrace upon her.

A few minutes' thought showed me that this was unavoidable. I had only to produce Lady Barbara's will, discovered by an accident, and to prove it a genuine document. With what difficulties this might be surrounded I knew not, since Anthony Grimshaw's helpless condition deprived me of my most important witness. There was, however, the evidence of Mrs. Winbolt to prove that a will had been executed, and within three weeks of Lady Barbara's death. No doubt Sir Everard Lestrange would contest the

matter to its furthest limits. For that I was fully prepared.

I put the will in my pocket, and slipped a folded tract, from the collection of that species of literature on Mrs. Grimshaw's table, into the wrapper, which I resealed, and then placed it beneath the old man's pillow. He might awake at any moment and hunt for the packet, but was scarcely likely to detect this innocent imposture.

'Twas now broad daylight. I drew back the curtains and extinguished the candle, which had burned to the socket. The old man awoke presently, and I gave him his breakfast, but he made no effort to find the packet under his pillow, nor did he make the faintest allusion to his searches in the Flemish commode. I fancied that the whole business had faded from the dim tablets of his memory.

I expected Mrs. Grimshaw's reappearance every minute, but the morning advanced and she did not show herself. Mrs. Hester, however, returned to her post in the sick-chamber, and watched us closely. Before this attentive damsel we took the liberty to converse in the French language.

'This is too important a matter to be treated lightly, Bob,' said my father, 'and I cannot rest till

you have put it in the right hands. There is poor old Tony yonder, who I fear cannot last much longer, yet whose evidence, could he but give it, would be most vital to your cause. I am as ignorant of English law as a babe, and I apprehend you are scarcely wiser.'

'Indeed, no, sir. I studied English jurisprudence closely for six months, but I doubt that seven years of Indian experience have gone a longish way towards blotting out all I learnt in that time.'

'Good! Then we may consider ourselves a pair of innocents—*twin children in ignorance*—and the sooner you submit your case to somebody who does know something, the better. There is your friend Mr. Swinfen, for instance—you have confidence in him, have you not?'

'Perfect confidence.'

'Very well. Then, if you take my advice, you will go straight to London, call upon Mr. Swinfen, give him a clear account of what has happened down here, and, if possible, bring him back with you, so that he may see that poor old man's condition with his own eyes, and hear—as he can hear from the servants in this house—the exact history of the midnight attack. There is no knowing how much a man of

that kind might discover on the spot. A lawyer has an acquired aptitude for ferreting out ugly facts. I will keep the ground for you while you are away, and you need not fear the result.'

I fully appreciated the wisdom of this advice, and though it went against me to leave the poor old man even for a day or two, I felt that my place was amply supplied by my father, towards whom his dim eyes always turned—whose presence seemed an unspeakable solace to him.

My father, whose disposition was as eager by fits and starts as it was careless by habit, was anxious that I should start on this errand at once, but the coaches did not accommodate this impatience. There was one which left Warborough at daybreak, and another at seven o'clock in the evening, and for this latter I determined to wait, though my father urged me to travel post.

'Nay, sir,' I said, 'to do that would be to invite more attention at Warborough than I care for, and would bespeak the urgency of my errand. We know not what creatures of his own Sir Evorard Lestrange may have in this neighbourhood, ready to send him news of my movements.'

I waited therefore till the evening, and it will be

seen in the upshot that my prudence chose the wrong course, as prudence is apt to do, upon occasions. I left the will in my father's keeping, and departed at five o'clock in the afternoon, without having been favoured with Mrs. Grimshaw's presence all day. She was ill, the maid told us; and I do indeed believe that Roderick Ainsleigh's return had [illegible] an overwhelming shock to her senses. I had [illegible] notice of my departure to no one, and, when the time came, went quietly downstairs, and along the darksome passages that led to the little side-door by which I had entered. On my way here I made a discovery which caused me considerable surprise and some suspicion.

I had occasion to pass the half-open door of an apartment which, although properly the still-room, was now used as a kitchen. I looked in, thinking to say a word or two to Mrs. Betty before leaving, when to my extreme surprise I beheld the pedlar, who had been my fellow-traveller from London, seated by the fire smoking, with a tankard on the table at his elbow.

The room was somewhat dark even at noonday, the narrow windows being overshadowed by a high wall which stood a few yards from them, and at this

hour it had scarce any light save that of the fire; but I could hardly mistake my gentleman, whose physiognomy—or rather whose nose and beard, for those only was I permitted to see, had made so strong an impression upon my mind. There the man sat, with the glow of the low fire crimsoning his figure—a greasy-looking velvet cap worn low upon his brow, his head sunk upon his breast in a meditative, or it may be simply lazy, attitude.

I did no more than peep in at the door and call Mrs. Betty to me. She was baking bread in a little room beyond the kitchen, and came to me with her hands floury.

'Who is that man?' I asked.

'A pedlar that sold my mistress a gown the other day.'

'What brings him here—in this house?'

'My mistress's charity,' answered Betty, with a grin. 'She is not commonly so compassionate, but this fellow is one of your pious customers—an out-and-out Methody—and I suppose that came over her. He had been ill, and was footsore, and she gave him leave to rest here a day or two. He sleeps in one of the empty garrets over the stables, and comes in here for his victuals.'

'A strange fancy!' I said. 'I should think Sir Everard Lestrange would scarce care to have his house turned into a phalanstery for the accommodation of such gentry. How long has the fellow been here?'

Betty began to count upon her fingers—'Wednesday—Thursday—why, he came the night before you did, Mr. Robert, after dark, and worrited me till I let him see my mistress. I was loth to take her his message, and expected a fine scolding, but she was more civil than usual, and said she knew Mr. Barnabas—that's his name, Barnabas—was a worthy man, and if she could lay out a trifle with him she would; and then she had him into the parlour to talk to her, and I suppose he told her some rare pitiful story, for by-and-by she came out and told me I was to provide him with a lodging for a day or two, till he got stronger.'

Betty had conducted me some way along the passage before making this communication, which she imparted to me—even at that distance from the subject of it—in a cautious undertone.

'It's a curious business altogether,' Betty said, 'but I have my own opinion about it, nevertheless.'

The good creature shook her head solemnly, as if she fully understood and coincided with me.

My own opinion was that the bearded pedlar was a spy, and a creature of Sir Everard's. I ran upstairs again, told my father, still in French, what had happened below, and counselled him to be on his guard against any tricks this gentleman might attempt in my absence; and then, having lost too much time already, went down again, examined the door, and finding that it was locked as closely as the door of a gaol, was fain to call Mrs. Betty once more from her bread-making and request her to let me out.

She was astonished at my departure.

'You're not going away for good and all, Master Robert, sure to goodness!' she exclaimed.

'No, Betty, I am going to Warborough on business,' I answered, coolly; 'but as I may not be able to get back to-night, you had best not sit up for me.' I think she would have remonstrated had I given her time, but I was in haste to be gone, and hurried off before she could question me further.

CHAPTER VIII.

I FIND MYSELF IN GREAT PERIL.

I HAD intended to look in upon my foster-mother, to acquaint her with the progress of events at the great house, and to charge myself with any special message which she might wish conveyed to Margery, but it was now too late for this visit, which would have taken me out of the directest way to the town. I walked off, therefore, towards a path that crossed the park and wood beyond, and then emerged upon a common—a vast waste of undulating turf dotted with furze bushes, with treacherous patches of swamp in the hollows, and here and there a reedy pool, and here and there a cluster of scraggy firs lifting their black ragged heads to the sky.

Beyond this common lay the high-road between London and Warborough, and I thought that if I was a few minutes late for the starting of the coach, I should have a chance of meeting it here.

It was a gloomy evening, and a gloomy walk. The sun had not shown himself all day, and the gray light was thickening even when I started. A blue-white vapour crept slowly up from the grass, until it spread itself over all the landscape like a sheet of still water; and this vapour, ghostlike and impalpable as it was, struck a deadly dampness and chill to my very bones. I wrapped the cape of my riding-coat round me, and hurried on at as rapid a pace as I could command, heartily wishing myself snugly ensconced in the corner of a postchaise, rather than a solitary pedestrian in a damp wood. I was very glad when I found myself clear of those labyrinthine walks beneath my ancestral elms and beeches, and on the edge of the common.

By the dim evening light, the prospect here appeared much wider than I would have cared to behold. 'Twas long since I had crossed Chippering Common, as the place was called, and I began to apprehend that I might go astray in that vast track of hollows and hillocks, and thus miss the coach—as I must inevitably miss it—if I lost any time on my way to the high-road. I looked in vain for any friendly light in the distance to guide my doubtful steps. Had I been in the interior of Bengal, the

scene could scarce have seemed more lonely. Not a living creature was visible. I heard a sheep-bell faintly tinkling, a long way off, and that one solitary sound was all that broke the silence of the dull-gray night.

There was nothing for me to do but make a dash for the high-road, crossing the common at right angles, and taking care not to be deceived by the undulating character of the ground.

I went along at a rattling pace, keeping as well as I could to the upper levels, and always looking ahead for the lights of the town.

I had walked upwards of a mile, when I did at last perceive a feeble twinkle in the distance—one solitary ray—which I took to proceed from the turnpike that stood about half a mile out of Warborough, on the London road.

'I can scarce do wrong to make for the turnpike,' I said to myself, and so steered my course in that direction.

I felt with some vexation that I was beginning to flag. I had walked at a good pace up to this time, but my strength was well-nigh exhausted, and I was painfully reminded of my affectionate Margery's tender warnings. 'Twas not so long since I had

risen, the veriest ghost of my former self, from a sick bed. And this was the first time I had attempted to walk any distance since my recovery. I began to feel that I had done a foolish thing in being thus unmindful of my condition, and to regret sorely that I had not taken my father's advice and hired a postchaise to convey me straight to London.

Those long days and nights of continuous watching in the sick chamber had not been without their effect upon me. I felt a kind of muddled sensation in my brain, which made me at times inclined to fling myself down upon one of the furzy hillocks and rest, at any hazard. My eyeballs ached for want of sleep, and my mind kept going over the same things with senseless iteration.

I was altogether in a very sorry condition, when I turned round upon the summit of a little knoll and saw that I had been followed.

I say I saw that I had been followed; for, from the moment when first I caught sight of two dusky figures bearing down upon me through the gloom, no doubt was in my mind that they had been dogging my heels all the way across the common, and that they meant evil by me. My hand instinctively flew to my pistols, and I stood still at the top

of the hillock with my face towards these two figures, prepared for the worst.

They stopped short on seeing me front them thus on my elevated ground. They had doubtless calculated upon dropping on me in a convenient hollow.

I heard them whisper together, saw them pause to look round, and then, seeing me still planted motionless and waiting for them, they came towards me. As they advanced I recognized the shorter of the two. It was the bearded pedlar. The other was a bulky scoundrel, in a smock-frock; a villain that looked as if he had received his education in the village stocks.

'What are you dogging me for, fellows?' I exclaimed, cocking my pistol.

'Twas the rustic ruffian who answered me.

'I suppose we've as good a right to cross the common as you, sir,' he said.

The pedlar had retreated to a respectable distance, with a hop, skip, and jump, evidently startled by the click of the hammer, when I cocked my pistol; but the other ruffian came boldly on.

'What do you want with me?' I asked; 'if you come another step forward I shall fire.'

'Will you?' roared the rascal, who was armed

with a bludgeon, which he now swung aloft in his right hand, while with his left he grasped me by the cravat.

Before his hand touched me I had pulled the trigger, aiming at his head; but the pistol snapped, and in the next moment it was wrenched from my grasp and flung away into space.

Weak as I was, I did not surrender without a struggle. I wrestled furiously with my brutal foe, but in vain. The bludgeon descended upon my uncovered head—my hat having fallen off in the beginning of the scuffle—and I sank senseless to the ground; but not before I had made a discovery in that uncertain light which all my efforts had failed to accomplish in broad day. The pedlar sprang forward to give his accomplice a hand when he saw me well-nigh overpowered, and grasped me round the neck from behind just as the ruffian raised his bludgeon in front. I turned suddenly, distracted by this unexpected attack, and brought my face close against the countenance of this scoundrel, who in that moment I perceived to be no less a person than Mr. Blade, the rascal attorney of Little Britain.

When I recovered consciousness, I found myself lying on a heap of mouldy-smelling straw, in dark-

ness, but above me I could just descry the glimmer of starlight through the chinks in the roof that covered me. 'Twas by this I first perceived that I was lying under some rude kind of shelter.

For some time I lay quiescent, in a semi-stupor, with a vague sense of aching bones and a battered skull. 'Twas cold, and by some brute instinct I snuggled closer in the tumbled straw which composed my couch. Little by little, a more perfect consciousness returned, with all its pains and cares.

Where was I? I felt too weak to rise and seek the satisfaction of my curiosity on this point. I think I must have lain thus for more than an hour, helpless, and wondering what had befallen me. But at last, with an effort, I dragged myself up and began to explore my quarters. I found myself in some small square shed, which might be either stable or hovel, and after infinite trouble discovered a door, fastened by a rough wooden latch, which I lifted, and emerged upon the common.

The mists had vanished, and the stars were shining faintly, paled by a lurid light in the east—the light of swift-coming day. I must have lain for near a dozen hours in that dismal hut, which on

inspection I found to be the deserted abode of some turf-burner.

I felt for my watch. It was gone, and my pockets had been rifled of all their other contents, except a latch-key, and a few loose papers of no significance. I was penniless. For some minutes I stood still to deliberate what I had best do—go back to Hauteville in this wretched plight, and send a messenger with a letter for Mr. Swinfen, entreating him to come to me? To do that would involve delay, and Swinfen might hardly credit so wonderful a story as I had to tell, unless I was at hand to explain the details. Again, whom could I trust to perform such an errand? To wait for the post would be too long a business. No; after a full consideration of the circumstances, I made up my mind to go on. Weak and penniless though I was, I would find some means of finishing my journey before nightfall.

The attack that had been made upon me was doubtless part of some deep-laid scheme, hatched by Everard Lestrange; and I marvelled considerably that his ruffian hireling should have hesitated to make an end of me when he had me in his grip.

'T would have accorded better with his master's pleasure had he made a clean finish of the business

while he was about it,' I said to myself. 'Indeed, 'tis likely enough he did leave me for dead on yonder heap of straw.'

I was happily not very far from the high-road. I could see Warborough Church steeple on my left hand, in the clear morning light. On my right lay, as I believed, the turnpike, and towards this I directed my steps. I had a massive chased gold ring on my little finger, which had escaped the attention of my assailants, and which I fancied might serve to bribe some friendly waggoner to give me a lift as far as London.

I doubt not that I looked a ghastly figure as I waited by the roadside for such an opportunity. A waggon laden with trusses of hay came rumbling along after a little time. I hailed the man, and asked him how far he was going.

'To Shoreditch, in London,' he answered, staring at me with all his might.

On this I told him my condition, and asked whether he would carry me to town, and set me down by the Temple, when I could pay him in coin, if he cared to wait while I fetched some money from my chambers. But if he doubted my honour, I would give him the ring from my finger as a guarantee of

payment, whenever he could contrive to call upon me.

The rustic grinned and scratched his head meditatively.

'The ring may be brass, for aught I know about it,' he said. 'I've seen a mort of such at Newberry fair, for sixpence a-piece. But you look like a gentleman, and I'll trust you as far as the valey of a ride goes. If you can travel a-top o' that there hay, I'll carry you to London before nightfall, and set you down hard by the Temple; and I'll wait upon you to-morrow morning for any trifle you may please to give me.'

'Spoken like a generous-hearted fellow!' said I. 'Be sure you shall not lose by your confidence.'

'But I say, maister, why doan't thee travel by the coach? She's quicker than my waggon.'

'I daresay she is, friend. But I'd rather ask a favour of a simple-hearted fellow like you than of a London-bred coachman.'

I mounted the waggon, and flung myself on the top of the closely-packed trusses, in which elevated position I fell asleep with the cape of my coat thrown over my face, and slumbered more sweetly than I had done for months. 'Twas mid-day when we got

to Slough, where my friend the waggoner insisted upon my sharing his dinner of cold boiled pork, bread, and small beer—a hospitality which I accepted as frankly as it was proffered. We jogged on at a slow but steady pace all the afternoon and evening, and it was about eight o'clock when I beheld the lights of London looming through a thick fog. I was set down hard by the Temple towards nine, after an uneventful journey, heartily pleased with myself for having pushed on so obstinately.

I went straight to my chambers, intending to wash myself and change my clothes before waiting upon Mr. Swinfen, whom I should have to seek at his West-end residence; but I had scarce put my key in the door—the ruffian who robbed me had been obliging enough to leave me this convenience—when a man emerged from the obscurity of the landing and laid his hand upon my arm, while a second stranger appeared, as if by magic, on the other side of me.

'Mr. Robert Ainsleigh,' said the first, as I stared in amazement from one to the other, 'I arrest you as my prisoner, in the King's name.'

'Arrest me?' I exclaimed indignantly; 'why, I owe no man a shilling!'

'Who talked about owing, Mr. Innocence?' cried the constable; 'I arrest you for the wilful murder of Sir Everard Lestrange, Baronet, of St. James's Square.'

I staggered as if I had been shot.

'The murder of Everard Lestrange!' I echoed. 'Is Everard Lestrange dead?'

'Come, I say, sir,' said the constable sharply, in a professional tone, 'it won't do to sham innocence with us; and anything you say now can be used agen you by-and-by. You'd better slip the bracelets on him, Jim.'

The fellow on my left side produced a pair of handcuffs, which they insisted upon putting on me; nor was I in any condition to hinder them. I submitted meekly enough, and only entreated the constable to tell me what had happened to Sir Everard Lestrange.

'He was foully murdered at one o'clock this morning, outside Mrs. Hunter's lodgings in Surry Street.'

'But why, in the name of Heaven, fix so awful a crime upon me?'

'For more reasons than one, Mr. Ainsleigh, as you'll find out, when you hear the evidence agen

you. First and foremost, you was his notorious enemy, and was known to have fought a duel with him, and been worsted. Secondly, you was his wife's old sweetheart; that's reason number two, and a good un. Thirdly, you was sweetheart of the lady he was following when he came by his end; that's reason number three, and a still better one. Lastly, and finally, he was stabbed through the heart by a dagger belonging to you: that's reason number four, and a clincher.'

The dagger—Jehangeer's dagger—which I had left upon Margery's work-table.

'He is dead, then?' I said, like a creature in a dream.

'Deader than door-nails,' answered the constable coolly; 'cut off in the flower of his youth, like a green bay-tree. But he'd lived an uncommonly rackety life, and had had his pennorth out of this world; that's a comforting reflection!'

After some persuasion, and my assurance that I would make no attempt to escape, these two gentlemen consented to remove my handcuffs while I went into my chambers to collect such clothes and other necessaries as I was likely to require in prison, whither I was to be carried immediately. While I

was getting these things together, the constable, who was of a communicative disposition, informed me that there had been a coroner's inquest upon the body of Sir Everard Lestrange that morning; and that Mrs. Hunter being in a distracted state, and too ill to give her evidence, her woman had been interrogated instead, and had unwillingly admitted that the dagger with which the victim was slain belonged to me. She had noticed it hanging over the chimney-piece at my chambers, when she had been there in attendance on my mistress. She had admitted also that I was her mistress's lover, and on bad terms with Sir Everard, who had for some time past persecuted Mrs. Hunter with his addresses. Another important witness against me had been Major Blagrove, who told the story of my assault upon Sir Everard with a horsewhip, and the duel which followed it.

'Upon which the jury, with scarce a minute's consideration, pronounced their verdick—Wilful Murder against Robert Ainsleigh,' concluded my informant.

'But what was there to connect me with the crime except the dagger which I left at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings last Sunday night?' I asked. 'No one saw me near the spot at the time of the murder.

It would, indeed, have been impossible for any one to do so, since I spent last night in Berkshire, and had come straight from that county when you seized me just now.'

'Did you come by coach—or po'shay?' inquired the constable.

'By neither. I travelled on the top of a hay-waggon.'

'A curious way for a gentleman to travel!' said the constable dubiously.

'Thereby hangs a tale,' I replied, 'which I can explain when I am called upon to do so.'

The constable coughed the cough suspicious or ironical, wherewith such gentry are prone to express their disbelief in any given statement.

'An *alibi's* well enough in its way,' he said, 'if it will hold water. But a weak *alibi* means Tyburn. And travelling a-top of a hay-waggon is a devilish weak *alibi*. Do you think you could find the waggoner, at a push?'

'I suppose so,' I answered carelessly enough, for I had as yet scarce realized the horror of my own position. I could think only of that one stupendous fact—Everard Lestrange was dead! 'I should know his face well enough.'

'But you don't know his name, or the name of his master, eh?' asked the constable.

'No.'

'Nor the inn where he puts up?'

'He was going on to Shoreditch—that's all I know.'

'Why, then, your *alibi* isn't worth a pinch of snuff!' exclaimed the constable, helping himself from a battered metal box as he spoke. 'There's no knowing what a good lawyer may do for you, but your hay-cart won't save your neck, Mr. Ainsleigh. Come, sir, 'tis time we were off. It puts the governor out of humour for folks to be coming in wanting beds at outlandish hours. You'd best bring all the ready money you can lay your hands upon.'

I had luckily upwards of fifty pounds lying in my desk, in notes and gold, and this I transferred to my pocket, after giving the constable and his underling a guinea a-piece, as a reward for their civil treatment of me.

Sweetened by this fee, they were kind enough to arrange my cloak so as to conceal my handcuffs, lest, even in the dark courts through which we had to pass on our way to a hackney-coach, those decorations might attract the eye of the passer-by. On coming

out into Fleet Street, we were fortunate enough to find an empty coach hard by Temple Bar, and into this I was politely handed by my companions, who took their seats, one beside me, and the other opposite, with his back to the horses.

Once, as we rode along, it flashed upon me that this business might be only some new plot of Sir Everard's—the story of his death a villainous invention; and these two men his creatures, who were about to convey me into some novel kind of bondage—on board ship, perhaps, to serve my King and my country before the mast.

I was not long in doubt, for we were soon at the gate of the prison, where I was admitted, after certain formalities to which I paid no attention. I need not dwell upon the discomforts of that night, which were less than I should have supposed inevitable in such a hideous situation as mine. I found the gaol filled with a motley company—men and women, youth and age, wretches innocent of every crime except poverty and its twin-brother, debt, herding with forgers, coiners, and assassins. Gambling, drinking, and quarrelling were, I found, the common diversions of the place; and while the poor had to endure all manner of hardships, and stomach

every species of contumely, the rich, as in a tavern, could call for whatever they desired, and found a'ready indulgence for any humour, however vicious.

There were ladies here—or women whose dress and bearing might fairly give them a claim to such a title; nor was beauty wanting in this strange assemblage. Nay, I beheld more than one youthful countenance of so fresh and innocent an expression, that I could but wonder what extraordinary accident had brought its owner into such a scene. But, upon inquiring of a civil neighbour, I found that in each case the accident was felony, and that the engaging young woman, whose simplicity I had compassionated, was among the vilest of her sex.

Not on the first night of my incarceration, however, did I observe these things. I passed through the indiscriminate crowd, seeing nothing, hearing nothing; for the figures around me seemed less distinct than the phantoms which Dante beheld in the under-world. I imagine that the constable had communicated the fact of my being decently provided with ready money to the governor, for that official received me with considerable civility, offered me a private room, which I could enjoy for the modest

sum of half-a-guinea a night, and strongly recommended me a bowl of punch to put me in spirits.

I informed him that my spirits were, at the present moment, rather bewildered than depressed, but begged him to order a bowl of punch, at my expense, for the refreshment of himself and the constable, if he were not too proud to drink with that functionary.

'I am too proud to drink with no man,' replied the governor; 'and there has gone out of this world many a decent fellow with whom I hobnobbed the night before his execution. It is amazing how small a difference a criminal career makes in a man's manners, and how pretty a fellow your forger or highwayman may be, in spite of his peccadilloes.'

It is not to be supposed that I slept very soundly that night, though my bed was better than I had expected to find it.

The position in which I found myself was one which would, I conceive, have filled most men with horror, but I had not yet realized the fact that I might be in actual danger. I must confess that my dominant feeling, throughout a long and thoughtful night, was a guilty satisfaction in the fate that

had befallen my enemy. Yes, vile as it may seem, I must needs confess the truth. I was glad that Eyerard Lestrange was dead. He who had so insolently defied my vengeance had succumbed to the Great Avenger. He was dead, and Dora was free. It was not possible for me to consider one fact without thinking of the other. She was free. Never to be mine, divided from me as widely as ever —and, oh! how bitterly I now regretted the impulse that had given my faith to another—but released from a bondage that she had admitted to be hateful. Could I be less than glad, for her sake?

'I will not rob her of Hauteville,' I said to myself, my thoughts reverting to the subject of the recovered will; 'the old place shall be her dower-house: and when I am far away in India, sleeping under my tent, it will be sweet to me to think of her dear figure in the familiar rooms where we were once so happy. If I can but persuade my father to remain in England, I will make her known to him, and he shall be the friend and guardian of her young widowhood. I can fancy those two would love each other; for her tender, clinging nature needs some stronger mind on which to lean.'

The picture was pleasing, but in the next moment I laughed aloud at my own folly. 'Fool!' I said to myself, 'can you suppose that a lovely woman, left a widow at five-and-twenty, and whose heart has never yet been satisfied, will find no better consolation than such company as you would choose for her? Do you imagine that the future is to be blank for her because *you* have bestowed yourself elsewhere? She may accept your generous offer freely enough, perhaps; and when you come back to England, after ten years' exile, and revisit Hauteville, you will doubtless find her at the side of her chosen husband, and with a bevy of fair sons and daughters calling her mother.'

The notion filled me with extreme bitterness; yet what right had I to wish her fate less happy?

Not once during that night did I seriously consider my own situation or its possible issues. The accusation brought against me seemed so preposterous in its nature, that I did not take the trouble to analyze it, satisfied that when the fitting time arrived I could easily demonstrate my innocence.

The next day was a dreary one. The early part of the morning I spent in writing letters in a small apartment off the public room, of which the

governor informed me I might secure the sole use for a consideration. I should have been willing to pay handsomely for the privilege of privacy, even in this darksome den, which was lighted only by one narrow-barred window, looking into a covered passage.

I wrote first to my father, informing him what had befallen me, and entreating him to keep his post at Hauteville, and watch our mutual interest there, rather than to alter his plans from any uneasiness on my account. My situation was, I admitted, an unpleasant one enough, but I did not doubt I should ultimately escape from my present entanglement. My second epistle was to Mr. Swinfen, relating the discovery of Lady Barbara's will, and requesting him to go to my father at Hauteville without delay, and begging him at the same time to send me a trustworthy attorney, versed in criminal business, who could take my case in hand. I wrote one other letter, consisting of but a few lines, to my poor Margery, telling her where I was, and beseeching her to be of good cheer, and to trust as implicitly as I did myself in that Providence which, I felt assured, would deliver me. These letters I despatched as soon as written, by

a safe hand. I roamed about the prison yard, staring idly at the miscellaneous inmates, and talking a little with some of the most decent-mannered of my companions in misfortune. The place was not unprovided with amusement—or rather debauchery—of the lowest kind. There was much gambling, more drinking, and wrangling, and abusive language prevailed on every side. Whatever mask these people might employ to cover their vices in better company, was here cast aside, and naked human nature frankly displayed itself in all its native ugliness. For a painter of manners with pen or pencil, like Fielding or Hogarth, there was here ample material.

I dined at the governor's table, in common with the wealthier of the prisoners, who were not in every instance the more refined in manners or appearance. There was a fat old woman in a greasy brocaded sack, and a satin petticoat trimmed with ragged lace, whose professional occupation 'twas scarce difficult to guess. Seated over against this lady was a gentleman whose person and manner alike smacked of the road; while his next neighbour I judged, from the bent of his conversation, to be attached to the honourable fraternity of

coiners. On my right hand there sat a young creature of barely twenty years, whose slovenly dress could not disguise her beauty, and who frankly owned to having stabbed her lover to death in a brawl at an Islington tea-garden.

Amongst these ladies and gentlemen the conversation was of the liveliest, and I have seen many duller dinner-parties where the guests were in full enjoyment of their liberty. Various kinds of strong drink were circulated freely, and it must be confessed that the sprightliness of this circle was of that factitious order which owes its life to spirituous liquors. The table was hardly cleared when the highwayman and the coiner clubbed together for a bowl of punch, to which expense I was invited to contribute. We paid on the nail for all we took, credit being against the rules of the establishment, though I believe it was granted in some exceptional cases. I discovered that the consumption of this famous punch was a source of much profit to the governor, and that the prisoners drank for the sake of putting him in good humour, as well as from an unaffected love of drinking.

In the course of the afternoon the governor came into the room, where I sat brooding by the fire, and

informed me that I was to be taken before the magistrate next morning, when the witnesses would be re-examined, and I should be, in all probability, committed for trial.

As he had shown himself amazingly civil to me, I ventured to ask him to give me a clear account of the particulars of the crime of which I stood charged, or to lend me a newspaper containing a report of Sir Everard's murder.

The governor seemed with difficulty to stifle a laugh. 'What!' he exclaimed, 'between friends, now, do you positively pretend to be ignorant of this business? You may be sure, sir, that I should think no worse of a man of honour for sticking a scoundrel that had wronged him. And 'twas about a woman, too! Anything is honourable where a woman's concerned.'

'Honourable or dishonourable, sir, I pledge you my word, as a Christian who fears his God, that I had no hand in the murder of Sir Everard Lestrange; nor do I know the full particulars of his fate to this hour.'

I had hardly spoken when the door was flung open, and a woman rushed in—a woman whose hood fell off as she ran towards me, revealing a pale, haggard

face, from which the unpowdered hair was brushed back tightly, and fastened in a knot behind. It was Margery. She did not fall into my arms, or sob, or shriek, after the ordinary manner of women, but grasped both my hands, looking in my face with an earnest, searching gaze.

'Robert,' she exclaimed, 'I will save thee, or die with thee!'

'God forbid thou shouldst do the last, dear girl,' I answered, touched by her fervour. 'Nor do I believe my circumstances so desperate as you may perchance imagine them, in your affectionate concern for my safety.'

The governor at this point discreetly left us alone together, retiring silently, and closing the door behind him.

'Alas! Robert, my heart misgives me. I fear thou art in danger. The dagger—your dagger. That speaks so loud against you. How, in pity's name, came you to part with it?'

'I left it in your room, on Sunday night.'

'In my room?'

'Yes, on the work-table by the window.'

'You left it there—and I never saw it? What a misfortune! I was so busy all the early part of

the week with a new character Mr. Garrick sent me, that I never went near the work-table; and Hannah, my woman, is idleness itself, or she must needs have found the dagger in her dusting. But, oh! Robert, who could have taken it?'

'Who, indeed, my dear?'

'I had all manner of people in and out of my room between Sunday and the night of the murder; but no one I could suspect of stealing that dagger.'

'Tell me the history of the murder, Margery. That may perchance give me some clue to the assassin.'

'As much as I know of it, Robert; and that is but little. Is it possible, though, that you have not heard all the particulars?'

'I have heard scarcely anything, my dear. When I questioned the governor of this place, just now, he evidently regarded my inquiry as an artful affectation of ignorance, by which I designed to demonstrate my innocence.'

'Oh, what a wicked world this is!' cried the poor girl, indignantly. 'Can any human creature be so vile in his own nature as to look in your face and believe you a murderer?'

'Alas! my dear, if the countenance is to be the

index of innocence, there are many in this place whose faces bear a fairer guarantee than mine, and many outside these walls who ought to be straightway handed over to the hangman. But the murder, Margery. How did that villain come by his doom?'

'All I know, Robert, is this much. He had been in the green-room that evening with his friend, Major Blagrove, and hanging about the side-scenes during the whole of the performance; but he had spoken to me less than usual—had, in fact, scarce approached me, except to wish me good-evening. Mr. Garrick was ill at Hampton, or Sir Everard would scarcely have been allowed to remain so long behind the scenes, for he always discourages idlers of that kind. He was there till the play was over, and then I suppose preceded me to Surry Street, whither I came, as usual, in a hackney-coach, as soon as I had changed my dress. I know not by what accident it happened, but by some mischance I left the street-door unlocked, although I have been in the habit of securing it every night, as I am the last to come in. I had not been ten minutes in the house before Sir Everard Lestrange walked into my room.'

'The infernal villain!'

'Ay, Robert, I question if there is any epithet too vile for him. I will not repeat what passed at that interview. Supplication, threatenings, insolence and brutality on his side, and on mine only scorn. "I never loved you," I told him, "not even when I was so weak and wicked as to trust myself to your honour." Had I been in the wretch's power, I know not to what infamy he might have descended, but I had Hannah close at hand, and a house full of defenders at my call. I entreated him to leave me, for you may conceive, Robert, that I scarcely dared call any one to turn him out of my room, lest he should revenge himself by blasting my reputation, as he distinctly threatened. The whole scene occupied something less than an hour. At the last he lost all command of himself, burst into a torrent of invective, and rushed from the room. I listened at the head of the staircase, and was rejoiced to hear him leave the house, slamming the street-door behind him. But I had scarce returned to my room when I heard an awful groan from the street below, and, flinging up the window, I beheld Everard Lestrange lying on the pavement but a few paces from the door-step. The street is villanously lighted, as you know, but I did just descry a flying

figure disappearing round the corner opposite, and I cannot doubt this was the assassin.'

'Had the dead man been robbed?'

'No; his watch and a purse full of guineas were found upon him when he was carried into the parlour beneath my lodgings. A surgeon was sent for immediately, and came within five minutes, but he was quite dead. The dagger had pierced his heart. Oh, Robert, conceive my feelings when they showed me the weapon, and I recognized in it that very Indian dagger which I believed you had carried with you on your journey! I had just enough presence of mind to keep silence: but the precaution was vain, for that foolish Hannah betrayed you at the inquest.'

'My dearest, the truth is best,' I answered quietly; 'and as I am utterly innocent of this crime, I have very little fear but that Providence will contrive my justification. I entreat you, therefore, to be calm, my dear girl, and to hope for the best.'

'Am I not calm, Robert?' exclaimed Margery, regarding me with the serene air of a martyr whose spirit soars above the mortal torture of stake or wheel; 'am I not calm? But it is the tranquillity of

desperation. Oh, my love, my love, innocent men have been sacrificed before to-day! Providence does not always interfere. And if I cannot save you——'

Her fortitude gave way at this point, and she burst into hysterical sobs; but when I rose to summon assistance, she checked herself with a heroic effort of the will.

'No, Robert, pray do not call any one. Let us be alone together while we can. We have so much to talk about. I will not torment you again with these cowardly tears. But, oh! my dearest, do not be too secure. Your innocence has to be proved. We must think, Robert—we must act. The law is pitiless. They will give us scant leisure in which to find the real criminal; and if we cannot find him——'

She shuddered, and clutched my hand convulsively—with fingers that were cold as death. There was half a bottle of wine on the table, the remains of a bottle I had ordered after dinner. I poured out a glassful, and persuaded Margery to drink it. Then stirred the fire into a blaze, and drew her chair closer to the narrow hearth.

'Come,' I said cheerfully, 'you must take a dish

of tea with me, Madge. You have no idea how comfortable they can make a man in this kind of place. Do you act to-night?'

'Yes,' she answered, with a deep sigh. 'They had to change the piece last night on my account, for I was really too ill to appear. But I have no such excuse to-night—and the play is *Jane Shore*. Mr. Garrick vows he shall be ruined if I play him false. I am bound to appear, Robert; but, oh! you cannot imagine how I dread facing the public, now that this horrible story has doubtless got abroad. Think how the town must have bemauled my wretched name since yesterday morning! That horrible story of the wager——'

'The wager!' I exclaimed, 'what do you mean, Margery?'

'What!' she cried, 'did you not hear of Major Blagrove's evidence before the coroner. He had been with Sir Everard behind the scenes, he said, and it had been settled between them that this night was to decide a wager that had long been pending. Oh! Robert, how can I speak the rest? That villain invited Major Blagrove to my rooms to supper at one o'clock. He had even gone so far as to order supper from a tavern in Fleet Street, which was brought to

the door at the moment he lay bleeding in the parlour. 'By the time the clock strikes one,' he said, 'this paragon of virtue, this paradox in petticoats, an honest actress, will have consented to declare herself openly—what she has long been *sub rosa*—my mistress.' Those were his words, Robert, which Major Blagrove repeated to the coroner. He—the Major—entered Surry Street as the clock of St. Mary's struck one. He was in time to hear his friend's dying groan, but was too far away from my door when the deed was done to distinguish the person of the murderer.'

'Margery,' I cried passionately, 'do you apprehend that Providence, which has inflicted such signal vengeance upon this villain, will permit an innocent man to suffer a shameful death?'

'Innocent men *have* suffered, Robert,' she said, piteously; 'I cannot forget that.'

It was now five o'clock, and at seven Margery must be at the theatre. I rang for lights and tea, which were quickly brought, and with my own hands I poured her out a comfortable dish of this feminine beverage. But, though I affected an amazing cheerfulness myself, I could not succeed in raising her spirits.

'Think what I shall suffer, Robert,' she exclaimed. 'This night, when I look upon that sea of faces, and know that every creature among the audience is familiar with the story of the murder—and my share in the night's work. Heavens, what a hideous notoriety!'

Yes, verily, a hideous notoriety, and the subject of it—she, whose horrible adventure was the town-talk—was my plighted wife. Would the world believe a woman spotless about whom this vile wager had been laid? Would the world ever cease to declare that it was on her account—and by a jealous lover—Everard Lestrange had been murdered? Shame unutterable set the hot blood tingling in my face as I thought of our miserable position—miserable even should Providence release me from my present peril.

Happily there was India before us, and in that remote world no one need know my wife's history. Yet the next instant I told myself that however distant the scene of our lives, the secrets of our past would doubtless ooze out, sooner or later. There is always some one to remember and betray. Some one would recognize the gifted actress of Drury Lane in the lovely Mrs. Ainsleigh.

In spite of these involuntary bitter thoughts, I did

my utmost to reassure Margery. 'The world will think no worse of you, my dear,' I said, 'because your honour has been assailed by a scoundrel; and the world has been too long familiar with Sir Everard Lestrange's character to be astonished by any new revelation of his infamy. Be assured that your reception to-night will be even warmer than usual—and act your best—and look your brightest —for my sake.'

'For your sake, Robert,' she repeated, with a profound sigh, 'what is there that I would not do for your sake—what sacrifice that I would hesitate to make?'

She looked at me searchingly, with an earnest, penetrating gaze, and then turned from me with another sigh.

'My dearest, be comforted,' I said; 'I have a rooted conviction that all will go well. Nor can I help being even elated by the fact of this man's death. There is a hardened villain the less in the world.'

'Snatched hence in so awful a manner, Robert,' she answered gravely, 'with not a moment for repentance!'

''Twas not in that man's nature to repent; if

it had been, God would have granted the opportunity.'

The clock struck six, and she was forced to leave me.

'I shall drive straight to the theatre,' she said; 'pray for me to-night, Robert.'

CHAPTER IX.

I BEGIN TO REALIZE MY DANGER.

Mr. Swinfen did not fail me in my hour of need. He sent a speedy answer to my letter, to tell me that he was off to Hauteville at once, as my story was so wonderful as to enlist all his curiosty, to say nothing of his friendship.

'I will now confess to you,' he wrote, 'that I always thought Lady Barbara meant to do something handsome for you, and that no one was more surprised than I when, by dying intestate, she left you unprovided for. 'Twas not like that dear lady to forget those she loved. Yet, when you called upon me, some months ago, I felt it my duty to discourage your suspicions of Sir Everard Lestrange, which seemed, in the face of the business, unjustifiable, and, if indulged in, would only, I thought, lead you into trouble. You may place full reliance upon my doing my utmost to see you righted in this busi-

ness, and to prove the will, should it be as genuine a document as you suppose. In the meantime, I have engaged Mr. Oole, of Lyon's Inn, to attend to your interests in this other unhappy affair, and I have every hope that he will place you in the way of proving your innocence of this most odious crime. I must remind you that extremest candour in your dealings with this gentleman will best serve your cause. Mr. Oole will wait upon you the first thing to-morrow morning.'

This gentleman was introduced while I was seated in my private apartment, making a pretence of eating a breakfast for which I had no appetite. He was a tall thin personage, with hollow cheeks, and a still hollower cough, and had been in a galloping consumption, as the governor afterwards informed me, for the last twenty years, or indeed as long as he had been a member of the legal profession, but had never grown any worse, or seemed any nearer death than at the outset.

'They call the fellow Old Churchyard in the Inns of Court,' continued the governor; 'but there isn't a better man alive to prove an *alibi*, or that can do it upon smaller grounds. He has cheated Jack Ketch of many a tip-top customer, I warrant you.'

'I do not desire him to invent any lies on my behalf, sir,' I answered sharply; 'I only wish him to demonstrate the truth.'

The governor shrugged his shoulders, as if in good-natured contempt for my folly in sticking so obstinately to an assertion of innocence which nobody could believe. But, to return to Mr. Oole, who, on being ushered into my room, stood contemplating me and my breakfast with a ghoulish air, as if wondering that I could relish anything less toothsome than a festering corpse.

'Will you join me, sir?' I said, pointing to the repast, which included a ham, a round of spiced beef, and a dish of eggs and bacon. The governor had supplied my table lavishly, no doubt with a view to swelling my bill.

'I thank you, sir, no; I never eat but twice a day: a substantial dinner at my chambers, at one, sent in from the nearst tavern—I am a bachelor, Mr. Ainsleigh—and a comfortable supper, partaken of at the same tavern, in the evening. Breakfast and tea are kickshaws which I despise.'

'But it is late, sir; why not take a snack while we talk over our business, and call it luncheon?'

'When you put it in that commonsense manner,

sir, I cannot refuse,' replied Mr. Oole, seating himself with an air that evidently meant business. 'In that case, I will begin with a rasher or two of bacon and three or four eggs. 'Tis a sin to see good victuals getting cold, and I opine you will pay as much whether you eat or no.'

'You may be very sure of that, sir. Shall I call for a fresh pot of tea?'

'The consumption of that drug, Mr. Ainsleigh, is a kind of dram-drinking which I leave to women. With your leave, I will take half a pint of small punch, or a pot of porter.'

I rang for a pint of the former liquor, which was brought with the usual alacrity, yet before it appeared Mr. Oole had disposed of the rashers and eggs and was cutting into the beef.

'Don't be afraid,' he said to me, in a reassuring tone, 'I mean to taste your ham presently. But pig upon pig is a bad kitchen. And now, sir, to business. I hope you will regard me in the light of a friend, and make a clean breast of it at the outset.'

'Upon my honour, Mr. Oole, I have nothing to confide to the ear of friendship which I could not trust to the whole world,' I replied.

'Come, sir, come, Mr. Ainsleigh, this is always

the way of it. A gentleman in your position is always shy at the beginning. He forgets that, although his situation is novel to himself, it is in no manner strange to his lawyer, and that a hundred good fellows have been in the same dilemma. Come, sir, between man and man, we know what this kind of thing amounts to. A gentleman, whose honour is easily wounded, sees a favoured rival stealing away from the house of his mistress (you perceive, sir, I am not neglecting the ham). As ill-luck will have it, he happens to carry a dagger about him, and in an evil moment, draws upon the traitor. A man might be immaculate in every other circumstance of his life, sir, and yet fall into this snare.'

'You have a pleasant manner of smoothing the way to confession, Mr. Oole,' I said, 'but I have nothing to confess. I had no hand in the assassination of Sir Everard Lestrange.'

'Pray consider, Mr. Ainsleigh, that I can serve you twice as well if you treat me with candour. I would pledge my life this ham was cured in Yorkshire. There was saltpetre in the pickle. Candour, Mr. Ainsleigh, candour between a gentleman in your situation and his lawyer is half the battle.'

'I will be as candid as you can possibly desire,

Mr. Oole. I was away from London on the night of the murder.'

'I should have preferred any other mode of defence to an *alibi*,' murmured the lawyer, 'it has been infernally over-done of late.'

I proceeded to give him a careful and exact account of my adventures from the moment I left Hauteville House, until my apprehension at the door of my chambers.

''Tis a strange story, Mr. Ainsleigh,' said the lawyer, who had listened to me with profound attention; 'and although I need scarce say that I myself place implicit credence in your word, it is my duty to inform you that the whole thing has somewhat the sound of a romance, and I fear will so impress the jury.'

'The jury, sir,' I exclaimed; 'do you apprehend the possibility of my being committed for trial?'

'Alas! my dear sir, I cannot see at present how we can hope to escape that issue.'

I rose, and paced my narrow den, strangely disturbed by this avowal. Not till this moment had I conceived that my apprehension was anything worse than a temporary embarrassment, from which I should be set free as soon as my case was investigated before a magistrate. I was almost dumfounded on find-

ing that Mr. Oole took so serious a view of my condition. After a few minutes' meditation, however, I argued with myself that this solemnity of his was only an assumption, designed to enhance the value of his professional services.

'You see, my dear sir,' he continued presently, 'on your own showing, you left Hauteville at five o'clock in the afternoon—or thereabouts. Now, may I ask you how far this Hauteville House is from London?'

'Five-and-thirty miles.'

'Five-and-thirty miles. You left at five in the afternoon, and the murder was committed an hour after midnight. There was ample time for you to be in London, it would no doubt occur to the minds of the jury. You perceive, Mr. Ainsleigh, that I am bound to contemplate this matter from their point of sight.'

'Of course. But by what conveyance was I to travel? If I had come by the coach, I should surely have been observed by some one?'

'That remains to be proved, sir. But even if we can demonstrate—as I hope we can—that you were not in the coach, it will be said that you might have found some means of providing yourself with a horse, or might have even walked the distance.'

'What, sir; when I was not a month ago lying on a sick bed?'

'You had eight hours to do it in, sir; or, supposing that you should be unable to walk upwards of four miles an hour for eight hours at a stretch, there are all the possibilities of a lift on the road. The onus will be upon us to prove that you were lying senseless in that deserted hovel on Chippering Common. True, there is your waggoner, whom I must make it my business to find, and who can prove picking you up in the Warborough Road at seven o'clock in the morning after the murder; but what if the prosecution replies that there was ample time for you to have got from London to Warborough between one o'clock and seven o'clock, and that your appearance at that place, and return journey to London, were an artful contrivance to throw off suspicion.'

'Good God, sir,' I exclaimed impatiently, 'what a tangle you are making of the business! Are you come here on purpose to show me that my case is hopeless?'

'No, sir!' he replied firmly; 'but it is only by examining this business on its darkest side that I can make myself master of the situation. As I

have implored you to be candid on your part, so shall I upon mine withhold from you no apprehension that I may feel on your behalf.'

'You are right, Mr. Oole, and I beg you to excuse my petulance just now. You will own my position is a trying one?'

'No apologies, I pray, sir,' said the attorney, with a stately wave of his hand. 'Now it strikes me, that our best hope—I might almost say our only hope—is in this scoundrel Blade. I happen to know something of the fellow, and know him for a rascal that would stick at nothing. It is therefore no surprise to me to hear of him acting as spy on behalf of Sir Everard Lestrange. His whole practice is of that order, and his reputed profession is but a mask, under which he performs all manner of dirty work. To convey bribes at an election, or to play the go-between for a profligate, comes alike to him.'

'What can you hope from such a man?' I asked incredulously.

'Everything. His patron being dead, he has nothing further to expect in that quarter: and can we but make it worth his while, and assure his coming off scot-free himself, he will be ready enough, I fancy, to betray Sir Everard Lestrange, and to

confess his share in the attack upon you that night. As he did not strike you himself, he was only an accomplice after the fact, and, with my help, could doubtless contrive to wriggle out of any ill consequences of the transaction. There is but one circumstance against us.'

'And that is——?'

'The fact that the fellow is such an arrant rogue that I doubt whether any jury will believe him. It will be so easy for the prosecution to fling discredit upon such a scoundrel.'

'Then this hope you talk of is next door to no hope, Mr. Oole?' said I.

'I don't say that, sir. If I find your waggoner, as I hope to do, and get this man Blade to confess to the assault on the Common, and to leaving you half dead in the hovel at nightfall; the two facts will dovetail—and one strengthen the other—like a mitre-join in carpentry. No, Mr. Ainsleigh, on my honour, I do not despair of getting you off.'

There was not very much encouragement in this assurance, and I began to think, with a strange sinking sensation at my heart, that I was, perchance, destined, after all, to end my days shamefully on a gallows. I saw the whole thing as in a picture,

and thought even of what my friends in the East, Colonel Clive, Mr. Holwell, Mr. Watts, and others, would think when they heard this dismal story. What if circumstances were too strong for me, and I was caught in a net from whose meshes there was no escape?

Mr. Oole saw my gloomy brow, and endeavoured to cheer me.

'Come, Mr. Ainsleigh, keep up your spirits!' he exclaimed; 'I have seen men much nearer Tyburn than you are, ay, within a few yards of the fatal tree, and yet come off scathless. Let us talk the business over in a comfortable, confidential way between man and man. It is quite clear that a man can't be murdered without there being somebody to murder him, as I suppose there is no good in proposing the hypothesis of suicide in this case.'

'There is no question about that,' I replied; 'Mrs. Hunter saw a man escaping round the corner almost as Sir Everard fell.'

'Mrs. Hunter might keep that knowledge to herself if we saw our way to transforming the murder into a suicide. But I am told, from the nature of the wound, which was at the back, under the left arm, it could scarce have been self-inflicted. Now,

presuming the gentleman to have been murdered, pray, sir, does your knowledge of himself and his surroundings afford you any hint as to the identity of the assassin?'

'Not the slightest. I knew the gentleman himself well enough, and knew him to be a most consummate villain—— "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*,"' the lawyer complacently murmured.

'That sentence, sir, would apply to Nero, yet Tacitus does not spare him. Of Sir Everard's surroundings, however, I know nothing.'

'And you have no suspicion as to the murderer?'

'None whatever. The crime is, to my mind, one of the most mysterious I ever heard of. Indeed, it seems to me that there is but one way of accounting for it, and that is by the supposition that the assassin was a common robber, who meant to plunder his victim, but was frightened by the opening of Mrs. Hunter's window, or the appearance of Major Blagrove at the other end of the street.'

'I can hardly think that, Mr. Ainsleigh: a common robber would scarce stab a man to the heart before rifling his pockets, and in such a place as Surry Street. Be sure the deed was inspired by revenge, and may perhaps have been perpetrated

by a hired desperado. Is London so much more virtuous than Rome or Venice, that crimes should be unknown here? The gentleman had a beautiful wife, I am told;—who shall say that it was not her lover who prompted——'

'Stop, sir!' I cried angrily. 'That lady is known to me, and is one of the noblest and purest among women. I must beg that you forbear any speculations that involve her good name. She is an angel, whose sole misfortune was to be mated with a villain.'

The lawyer looked at me with a curious attention as I spoke, and in the next moment I regretted my precipitation. That insinuation about Dora so disgusted me with the man, that I felt now only eager to get rid of him.

'Your own wisdom must guide you in the conduct of this business, Mr. Oole,' I said, 'for I can give you no further assistance.'

'I must do my best, sir,' he replied, gravely; 'I shall ask for a remand this afternoon, and it will go hard with me if I have not seen Mr. Blade before to-night. But I do not expect to get the better of that exemplary scoundrel in one interview; for, however I may touch him by an appeal to his pocket,

it will require time to subdue his caution, which will make him naturally averse from committing himself.'

'With regard to funds, Mr. Oole?' I began.

'Mr. Swinfen has provided me with the sinews of war, sir. You need give yourself no uneasiness on that score. I have the honour to wish you a very good morning. We shall meet in court at one o'clock.'

It was now nearly noon. I sat brooding over the fire for upwards of half an hour, infinitely more depressed than before the attorney's visit. He had presented my situation to me in a new light, and I now felt that the issue was something worse than doubtful. If this man, whose trade it was to disentangle this kind of knot, could not see his way to my deliverance, my case must indeed be desperate; and there had been that in Mr. Oole's manner which led me to conclude he saw very small ground for hope. Heaven knows, if this notion made me cast-down, 'twas not that I loved life so dearly for its own sake, for many a time since my illness I had reflected how heavy a burden of care and doubt would have been lifted off my shoulders if that sickness unto death had verily proved the closing scene. But to behold myself marked out from my fellow-men as

a secret assassin, condemned to depart from this world by the most degrading exit, to know that my name for all time to come would be odious and execrated! This made a prospect not easy to contemplate with fortitude, and I felt for the time more stupefied than pained by the immensity of my new trouble. Yet, amid all selfish consideration of my own peril, one image reigned supreme in my mind. 'Twas that of Dora, widowed, alone, horror-stricken, and doubtless but too well convinced of my guilt.

'To go out of this world hated by all the human race besides, is less agonizing to my spirits than to know myself odious to her,' I thought, in that bitter despairing half-hour, when I for the first time entertained the idea that I was abandoned by Heaven, and doomed to suffer for another man's crime.

At one o'clock I found myself in a stifling law court, to which the light of a dull autumn day could scarce enter through the smoky panes of two tall narrow windows, further obscured by the high wall which rose a yard or so beyond them. It is impossible to imagine a scene more gloomy, or a ceremonial less impressive. The magistrate shuffled through the investigation with as indifferent an air as if the crime of which I stood charged had been

the pettiest offence in the calendar. There were half a dozen cases in waiting, to come on after mine. Everybody seemed in a hurry, and it was as much as Mr. Oole could do to obtain time to cross-examine the witnesses against me.

These were Major Blagrove, Margery, Hannah Surfet, her maid-servant, a surgeon, and a couple of watchmen who carried the dead man into the lodging-house parlour in Surry Street. I need not recapitulate the evidence, which corresponded in every particular with the account I had already heard from Margery, although she of course refrained from any revelation of the nature of her interview with Sir Everard Lestrange. He had paid her this midnight visit against her will, and had left her in anger. That was all she admitted, though close pushed by the lawyer for the prosecution.

'Upon my soul, madam,' said this gentleman, in the course of her examination, 'you are marvellously lucky to stand where you do, and not in the dock; for had not Major Blagrove seen his friend fall, and a man bolting round the corner, it might have been thought your own fair hand had made away with your importunate lover.'

He pressed her hard after this for a description of the figure she had seen flying round the corner.

'Come, madam, such brilliant eyes as those must have seen clearer than you will acknowledge. Was the fellow tall or short, fat or thin? Was he not the same size as that gentleman yonder, the prisoner? Come, madam, now, in candour, was he not the same figure as the prisoner, to a T?'

'No, sir,' cried Margery, in her spirited way, 'he was no more like Mr. Ainsleigh than you; but the glimpse I had of him was so brief, the night so dark into the bargain, that I cannot take upon myself to say what he was like.'

'Then he *may* have been like the prisoner?'

'I think not, sir; I believe I should have recognized *him* even by the briefest glance;' and she flung a tender look at me as she spoke.

Upon this the lawyer badgered her still further, scenting the secret of her attachment to me, and trading upon his knowledge; but he could extort nothing from her to my disadvantage. Indeed I believe this brave and generous soul would have perjured herself rather than make an admission that could be used against me.

Mr. Oole asked for a remand, which, after some

parley, was granted, although I believe the magistrate would have felt more satisfaction in committing me at once. The examination was adjourned to the following week, and I was conducted back to my prison.

Here I received another visit next day from Mr. Oole, who brought me no news from which I could extract comfort. He had been to Mr. Blade's chambers, but the gentleman had been denied to him by a dirty scrub of a boy, who was at once his clerk and body servant. On this he had set a watch upon the lawyer's den, but at present with no result. Nor had his search for the waggoner who brought me to London been as yet rewarded, though he had sent into Shoreditch to inquire among any corn-merchants whom his messenger could find in that neighbourhood.

'One cannot expect to succeed in this kind of business off-hand, Mr. Ainsleigh,' he said cheeringly; 'and I must implore you not to droop. I shall send a confidential person down to Warborough, to hunt for the waggoner, and I shall keep an eye upon Mr. Blade.'

'Did you ask the clerk where his master had gone?'

'Yes, I examined the young vagabond closely, but could get little out of him. His master had gone into the country the day before, but he could not tell where. I asked him if he was positive it was yesterday his master went, and not several days ago, as I had good reason to believe; but the imp protested it was yesterday, and showed me a dirty sheet of paper stuck on the door with "Back to-morrow" written on it in Blade's hand. "Why, you Satan's imp!" I exclaimed, "that paper is at least a week old." But the rascal stuck to his text to the last gasp.'

'Can you conjecture the man's motive for keeping out of the way?' I asked.

'Why, he is doubtless waiting to see how the land lies, and if it strikes him by-and-by that he can make money by coming forward and peaching upon his late employer, with safety to himself, you may be sure he will do it.'

'Think you he is still at Hauteville, and ignorant of his patron's death?'

'No; for, after having disabled you that evening, his next business would bring him straight to London, to acquaint his employer with all that had taken place in Berkshire. I feel confident that he is

hiding somewhere in this city, and it shall go hard with me if I do not unearth him.'

This seemed to me poor comfort, but I was fain to be content with it. That afternoon brought me a friend in the person of my father, who had only waited at Hauteville to close the eyes of his old tutor, before hastening to my side.

'The poor soul expired the night before last, Robert,' he told me, 'gliding out of this troubled life at the last as peacefully as an infant. He died in my arms, and addressed me by my name in the last hour of his existence. Swinfen arrived at Hauteville some time before I left, and I gave the will into his keeping. He will obtain any evidence that is needful to be got down there.'

'Did you see anything more of Mrs. Grimshaw before you left?' I inquired.

'They summoned her when her husband was dying, and she came in and stood beside his bed, looking more like a ghost than a living creature, but we did not exchange a word. When the vital spark was fled, she stalked away again, gloomy and silent as a shade.'

My father's presence gave me inexpressible comfort. That daring and sanguine spirit of his

seemed to bring light and life into my prison. He had, or affected to have, no doubt as to the issue of affairs, and after we had once fully discussed my circumstances, he made no further allusion to the murder or to my situation, but brought me the news of the town every morning, and cheered me with his lively conversation.

During the week that passed before the adjourned examination, I was somewhat surprised to see but little of Margery, who only visited me twice in that interval, and then but for half an hour at a time. On each of these occasions she was deadly pale, and had the look of a person whose nights have been sleepless.

'You have your father's society, Robert,' she said to me, somewhat sadly, 'and can hardly miss my poor company.'

'Indeed, you are wrong, Madge. I have missed your bright face sorely in this dreary den.'

'It has well-nigh lost its brightness, now, Robert,' she answered in the same serious tone. 'Not that I am fearful about you, dear,' she added hastily; 'nay, do not think that. I have every hope of seeing your innocence exemplified.'

I urged her to tell me the reason of her sadness—

if it really did not proceed from any uneasiness on my behalf—but she would not satisfy me.

My father was present at my next interview with Mr. Oole, which took place on the morning before the examination. He had discovered the retreat of Mr. Blade the lawyer, in a low neighbourhood beyond Limehouse, where he had set up his household gods in a somewhat clandestine *ménage*.

Here Mr. Oole had stalked him with much difficulty; but although he nibbled at the bait, he was not yet to be tempted, and declared his ignorance of the attack made upon me, at the same time vigorously denying his identity with the bearded pedlar.

'I do not despair of bringing him to reason, Mr. Ainsleigh,' said my champion, 'between this and your trial.'

'My trial, sir!' I exclaimed in a fever, 'do you intend that I should be committed for trial?'

'Intend, sir! you may suppose that my intentions are of the best on your behalf; I would have you set at liberty to-morrow; but I fear that, under the present aspect of affairs, it will be impossible to hinder your committal.'

I shuddered at the thought; to be committed for

trial seemed to me almost as deep a disgrace as to be found guilty.

'Pray sir,' said my father, who had listened silently heretofore, with a serious but perfectly tranquil countenance,' by whom is this prosecution undertaken?'

'In the first instance, by the gentleman's family—his widow rather, since he has no other family'—replied the lawyer; 'and in the next place, the Crown, which, in consideration of the victim's elevated position, and the peculiar enormity of the crime, has offered an additional reward of £100 for the conviction of the murderer.'

My heart grew cold at this intelligence. It was at her suit, then, that I had been seized as a felon; at her suit that I languished in this durance, from which the sole gate seemed to be death. I had never troubled myself to consider who was my prosecutor, and this revelation came upon me with double force on account of my previous indifference. My father was more thoughtful than his habit after Mr. Oole's departure, and left me in less than half an hour, promising to return in the evening. To my surprise, however, and not a little to my disappointment, he failed to keep his word, and I spent a melancholy night in solitude.

CHAPTER X.

I BECOME DEEPER IN DEBT TO MARGERY.

The preliminary part of the examination was little more than a recapitulation of the evidence already given. Major Blagrove was somewhat more diffuse than before, and declared that the deceased had, after the duel between us, frequently spoken of me as his enemy, and protested that he went in danger of his life on my account. But this, after some squabbling between Mr. Oole and the lawyer for the prosecution, was rejected as not being evidence.

The fact of my assault upon Lestrange with the horsewhip, and the challenge that followed it, was, however, admitted, as showing our previous relations; and I could see that this circumstance bore hard against me in the mind of the magistrate, who was but little disposed to be lenient.

The examination went on, and Mr. Oole seemed,

I thought, to do no more in my behalf than to cavil at the examination in chief, and split straws with the prosecution. I began to wonder whether he had any witnesses to produce on his side, and my doubts were agreeably relieved at last by the appearance of the young waggoner who had brought me up to London the morning after the murder.

This young fellow my solicitor produced with an air of triumph, and proceeded to show, by his examination, that as I was at Warborough Turnpike at seven in the morning, I could hardly have been in Surry Street at an hour after the previous midnight. To my horror, however, I perceived, by the drift of the prosecuting attorney's cross-examination, that this evidence on my behalf was next to valueless—nay, was likely to be damaging; for this gentleman dwelt so strongly on my ghastly and disordered appearance when the waggoner picked me up, my sleeping out the day a-top of his waggon, being evidently in a state of extreme exhaustion, and my eccentricity in preferring this waggon to the more ordinary mode of conveyance afforded by the coach, that he went a long way towards demonstrating that the whole business was a planned thing, designed to frustrate the ends of justice.

The cross-examination of this witness, who had innocently done his best to ruin me, was just over, and the countenance of my defender was growing momentarily more anxious, when I heard a clamour and bustle at the entrance to the court, and presently beheld a man borne in between two chairmen and carried to the witness-box. He was pale as death, and seemed in mortal agony, and so awful was the aspect he presented to my view, that some moments elapsed before I recognized in this death-stricken countenance the face of that harmless lunatic Johnson, the actor.

He was accommodated with a chair, and while this was doing I perceived that a letter was handed to my lawyer, which he tore open hastily, and perused with an attentive brow.

'This person is a most important witness for the defence, your worship,' he said to the magistrate, 'and after you have heard his evidence I shall beg leave to produce another, whose statements will confirm those of this gentleman.

'If he can do no more for your client than your Berkshire waggoner has done, sir, I think you had as good kept him out of the witness-box,' replied the magistrate testily. 'It is somewhat of an innova-

tion to bring sick men into court, and I hope the result will justify the procedure.'

'I have very little doubt of that, your worship.'

There was something in Mr. Oole's manner, cool and deliberate as he tried to appear, that made me suspect the entrance of Mr. Johnson to be as great a surprise to him as it was to me. He referred to his letter again, and at this moment I saw my father enter the court for the first time, and take his stand a little way within the door, where he could see and hear all that took place. I had been wondering before this at his non-appearance among the spectators of a scene which concerned me so nearly.

The actor was sworn, and my defender began to interrogate him.

'You know something of this business, it seems, Mr. Johnson?'

'I know more about it than any man,' answered the wretched being, who was propped up on one side by one of the men who had carried him in, and who, but for this support, would evidently have fallen out of the chair in which he was seated. He spoke in so faint a voice, that it was not possible he could have been heard by any one at the back of the court.

'Perhaps you will be so good as to tell us what you know. There is this dagger, for instance, with which the deed was done.' Mr. Oole pointed to my famous Indian dagger, which had been so mysteriously dyed in the blood of my enemy, and which had been produced in court at both examinations.

'Come, sir,' continued Mr. Oole, 'did you ever see that weapon before to-day?'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Johnson; 'I saw it a fortnight ago, on a Monday afternoon, at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings.'

'On Monday afternoon—a fortnight ago—that would be Monday, the nineteenth of October, I think.'

'Yes; 'twas the nineteenth of October.'

'Upon my honour, sir, this is irrelevant,' exclaimed the magistrate; 'I cannot have my time wasted by such stuff as this.'

'I must entreat your forbearance, sir; you will perceive presently that the questions I have been putting are not irrelevant. This witness saw the dagger at Mrs. Hunter's lodgings on Monday afternoon. The prisoner left London for Berks by stage-coach at daybreak on the same Monday, the

nineteenth. I am in a position to prove that, and that he did not leave Berkshire till he was carried away by the witness you have just heard. The *alibi* is, I think, complete.'

'How do you make that out, sir?' The prisoner left Sir Everard Lestrange's house at five in the afternoon, and was not picked up in the Warborough road till seven next morning. He had time enough to be in London in the interim.'

'That is a question of computation of time, sir, which cannot be gone into too nicely. But if I can disconnect my client from the weapon with which the deed was done, I feel sure you will admit that I have destroyed the chief evidence against him.'

'Go on, sir,' said the magistrate, in a surly tone.

'Come, now, Mr. Johnson,' continued the lawyer, 'pray, what led you to remark the dagger?'

'Gentlemen,' exclaimed the actor, with a general appeal to the whole assembly, 'I am a dying man. You behold one who deemed himself born for greatness—who even in this dire extremity still dares attest that there burns within him some spark of that immortal fire which men call genius—but for whom the sands of life are so fast running out,

that it matters little in what ignominious notoriety his days may have their dismal close.'

'Great Heaven!' cried the magistrate, in a rage, 'am I seated here to listen to a madman?'

'I beseech you, sir, let the witness tell his story his own way,' pleaded Mr. Oole. 'You are about to hear a startling revelation. Come, Mr. Johnson, we will take your genius for granted, but how about this dagger?'

'I cannot touch on that without tearing asunder the bandage that confines a bleeding heart. I will be as brief as I can; but I must touch upon the history of a passion as faithful and as pure as any that the greatest poets of the world have made the subject of their verse.'

The magistrate groaned aloud, and flung himself back into his chair.

'Pray, sir, be more concise,' said Mr. Oole.

'I waited upon Mrs. Hunter, sir, to communicate to her some trivial arrangement connected with the business of Drury Lane Theatre, and after I had done this, I lingered to upbraid her with the coldness and indifference with which she requited such a devotion as is rarely laid at the feet of woman. I accused her of a preference for Mr. Ainsleigh,

which she immediately admitted, and, stung by this new proof of her coquetry, I reminded her that she had also given a tacit encouragement to the notorious pursuit of Sir Everard Lestrange. On this she flew in a passion, asked me how I dared insult her in her own house, and left the room, telling me in the most cutting manner that as she could not order me out of her apartment, she could at least protect herself from my insolence by leaving me. Oh! sir,'—this in an appeal to the incensed magistrate, who was beating the devil's tattoo on the arm of his chair,—'you, whose vast experience has, doubtless, taught you to comprehend the most subtle workings of the human heart,—you, sir, must know how strange a passion love is. No sooner was the divine creature gone than I gave way to a flood of tears, in my sorrow at having offended her. "Merciful Powers!" I exclaimed, "why do I keep this worthless life, which enables me to succeed in nothing but in making her hate me? If I were dead, she would, perchance, drop a tear of pity on my grave." I gave a distracted glance round the room, calculating the distance between the windows and the street below, and for the moment fully intending to destroy myself by springing from one

of them. That glance, hurried as it was, showed me yonder dagger lying amidst a litter of silk and ribbon on a table near one of the windows. Scarce had my eyes perceived it when I darted upon it as a tiger on his quarry, and hid it in my breast. "This will serve," I said to myself, "for a death that shall be at once more dignified and less public."'

'In plain English,' said Mr. Oole, 'you stole the dagger.'

'So far I admit myself a thief, sir,' replied the actor, with ineffable dignity. 'I took the dagger.'

'And did not kill yourself with it?'

'No, sir. I killed Sir Everard Lestrange.'

I started as if I had been shot, so intense was the surprise evoked by this brief sentence. There was a general movement in the court, and I saw my father wave his hat at me across the intervening crowd, as much as to say, 'You are saved.'

The magistrate took the matter in a very different humour. He gave a second groan, louder than the first.

'If you think, sir,' he cried, 'to benefit the prisoner by bringing forward a madman to take this murder upon his shoulders, you will find your mistake, by-

and-by. Such tomfoolery as this can only injure your client.'

'I beg your pardon, sir. If you will be patient, I shall be able to support Mr. Johnson's statement by independent testimony. In the meantime, I entreat you to hear him to the end, and with some indulgence. He has come here in a very noble spirit, prepared to encounter the worst results of his candour, in order to save an innocent fellow-creature.'

''Tis a case of Damon and Pythias in a criminal court, sir, I protest,' cried the magistrate, contemptuously.

'Nay, sir, so far from being friends, you hear that my client and Mr. Johnson were rivals,' remonstrated Mr. Oole, and then went on with his interrogation. 'Now, Mr. Johnson, will you be kind enough to tell us what you did with that dagger?'

'I carried it in my breast for four days,' replied the actor, 'intending to play the Roman's part, and die as Brutus died. But I had my worldly affairs to arrange, and the few remaining years of a bedridden parent to provide for. I had a little to leave behind me, and for the rest, I trusted to the generosity of one who had ever been kind to the needy. I allude

to Mrs. Hunter. This duty performed, my road to dusty death was clear. In this manner the week wore on till Friday evening — and I still lived. On that evening I saw Sir Everard and his friend the Major behind the scenes of Drury Lane Theatre. I had very little to do in the piece performed that night, and some leisure in which to observe them. I hung about near them, unnoticed, and contrived to overhear some of their conversation. There was a wager to be decided between them that night—a wager in which Mrs. Hunter was concerned. An appointment was made for a supper in Surry Street at one o'clock. "At which hour I will introduce you to a lady who has been my mistress for the last seven years, but whose prudery has forbidden her to avow it," said Sir Everard. Consider, gentlemen, if this was not enough to kindle infernal fires in the breast of one who had long worshipped this lady with an almost religious homage. I had revered her, gentlemen, as profoundly as I adored her. Conceive my feelings, then, at hearing her spoken of thus. For the rest of that night I was indeed a madman. Everything was against me. Little as I had to do I was engaged to the very end of the performance, and it was after midnight before

I could leave the theatre. I went straight to Surry Street. There were lights in Mrs. Hunter's windows, but all was dark below-stairs. I stood on the opposite side of the street and waited—waited with this wretched brain on fire. It was not long. As the clock of St. Mary's church struck one, I heard the door opened quickly, and Sir Everard Lestrange came out. Gentlemen, if it were to do again, I would do it.'

He looked round the court as he said this, at the top of his voice, with a conviction that was almost heroic. There was not so much as a murmur or movement in all that assembly.

'I drew my dagger. I know not how long my hand had been clutching the hilt, but I know it was in my grasp when the door opened. I darted across the road, and came upon him, a little behind. Oh, gentlemen, as I stand here, it was by no deliberate cowardice, I stabbed him in the back. I would as lief have met him face to face—as lief have exchanged shots with him across a pocket-handkerchief,—but I meant to kill him.'

'That will do, sir,' cried the magistrate; 'it is against all precedent that you should stand there to criminate yourself in this manner.'

He gave an order to one of his myrmidons, and Mr. Johnson was removed from the witness-box, but detained in custody in another part of the court. The next witness called was a certain James Waddy, waiter at the 'Bull-and-Mouth,' Fleet Street.

'Were you in Surry Street on the night of Sir Everard Lestrange's death?' Mr. Oole asked, after this witness had been duly sworn.

'I was.'

'What happened while you were there?'

'My master sent me and another man with the supper that Sir Everard had ordered for one o'clock. It was a hot supper, and we brought it in covered dishes on two trays——'

'The supper is not to the point, sir,' growled the magistrate.

'We came down Hay's Court, you see, sir, which was the shortest way,' continued the witness, somewhat disconcerted, 'and it was striking one as we turned out of the Strand. "We're after time, Jim," William Dwyer, the other waiter, says to me, for you see, sir, Sir Everard Lestrange had laid it down as the supper was to be to the moment——'

'You are rambling, sir,' interjected the magistrate, in a stentorian voice.

'I beg your worship's pardon, but I was coming to the point. Turning sharp round the corner, with my tray upon my head, which is always tipuppy like, yer honour, what should I do but come full tilt against a fellow running for his life, as pale as a ghost.'

'How do you know that he was pale, sir?' demanded the magistrate. 'We have been told that the night was dark. Indeed, the almanack tells us as much. There was no moon!'

'Begging your worship's pardon, but there's a lamp at the corner of Hay's Court, and I saw his face as plain as I can see yours.'

'Well, sir, and his face was the same face as the prisoner's yonder, was it not?—a little paler, no doubt, for he has summoned up all his impudence to brazen out to-day's business, but the very same face, I'll be sworn.'

'Begging your worship's pardon, no, my lord. The prisoner is not the man. We went bang up again each other, and I nearly lost my equilaborum, and felt my tray upon the slip, but I balanced it somehow. The man's face was within a foot of mine when he bounced again me; and I never saw such a white, scared-looking wretch as he was.'

'Eh, you protest the prisoner is not the man? Remember, you are on your oath, sir, and prevarication here is rank perjury. Now, have you ever seen the man since that night?'

'Yes, your worship. I saw him at the door of the court just now, a sick gentleman, that was brought here in a chair.'

This witness was examined and cross-examined, but his evidence, so far as it went, was not to be shaken. This interrogation closed the day's proceedings, and I was again remanded. I found my father at the door of the court. He clasped me in his arms with irrepressible rapture.

'My boy, thou art saved!' he exclaimed in a choking voice. 'Oh, Robert! thou canst never know what infernal agonies I have suffered in the week that is just over.'

I grasped his hand in silence. Had my life depended upon the effort, I could not have spoken a word. We got into a coach together, my jailors still in close attendance upon me, for my captivity was not yet over. We had driven to the prison before I was calm enough to ask any questions. As soon as my father and I were alone in my room, I began to interrogate him.

'How, in the name of Heaven, came that unhappy wretch to acknowledge his crime?' I exclaimed.

''Tis a wonderful story, Robert,' replied my father, 'and you shall hear it only from the lips of the heroine.'

'The heroine!'

'Yes, child; and as great a heroine, to my mind, as any of your mythical or historical damsels—your Unas or Joans. 'Twas Margery who saved you, Robert; Margery who brought that fellow to denounce himself; Margery who first hit upon the right scent; who hunted out the evidence against this man Johnson, and so worked upon his poor weak soul as to bring him where you saw him to-day. No one else could have done what she has done. Upon my honour, Robert, you owe her the devotion of a lifetime!'

'And I will pay the debt, sir,' I answered, solemnly.

Yet in that moment, for the first time since the light had broken upon my situation, my spirits sank to zero. My first definite thought, after I had recovered the first shock of Johnson's revelation, had been the thought that Dora Lestrange would discover that I was not a villain. To be scorned by her

was a shame tenfold more dreadful than the contumely of all the rest of mankind. To stand exonerated before her was a relief that raised my soul to the seventh heaven.

But she was nothing to me; and all the warmest feelings of my heart were due to the woman who had succoured me in my illness and saved me in my peril. I was not altogether a renegade to that generous and faithful soul. At the cost of a more bitter pang than any words can describe, I thrust Dora's dear image from my heart, and turned all my thoughts to that future which was to be shared with Margery.

CHAPTER XI.

I COME INTO MY ESTATE.

My father left me soon after my return to the prison, in order to go back to the court to ascertain what had been done with Mr. Johnson; and he had scarcely departed when Margery appeared. She was as pale as on the day when she first visited me in this dismal place, but there was an almost seraphic joy in her countenance.

'I have saved thee, Robert!' she exclaimed, as I took her in my arms and pressed my lips upon her pale forehead. Her face and hands were cold as ice, and I made her sit down close to the fire before I would hear another word.

'Yes, dear girl,' I replied, 'you have saved this worthless life for the second time, and henceforth its owner is your slave!'

'Oh, Robert!' she said, with a mournful shake of her head, 'I do not want a slave.'

'Your lover,' then—your husband! Your fond and faithful servant until death!'

'Dear Robert'—still with the same grave and almost mournful manner, which contrasted strangely with that look of joy she had worn when she entered my room,—'dear friend! you are too grateful. If Heaven had not inspired me, I could have done nothing. God has been good to me, Robert. When I left you, after my first visit here, it was with an aching heart. I knew not which way to turn. I racked my wretched brain, but all was blank. I could imagine no solution to the mystery of that bad man's death. Then came the thought of that dagger. I called Hannah, and questioned her closely about the table where you told me you left that fatal weapon. Had she touched it to dust or tidy it at all last week? Yes, she told me; she had arranged my work on Tuesday morning—the Tuesday morning before the murder—and she would take her oath there was no such thing as a dagger on the table. She is a truthful creature, and would not, I felt sure, deceive me. This set me thinking who could have taken the dagger, which must have been removed on Monday, if your impression that you had left it on my work-table was to be relied on. I had had but two visitors on that

day—one of my fellow-actresses, who came to take a dish of tea with me, and Mr. Johnson, who brought me notice of the night's performance. My mind fixed immediately on this last. He had been shamefully violent in his conversation with me, and had repeated a threat which I had too often heard from his lips, and which was no less than that he would assuredly be driven to destroy himself if I persisted in rejecting his suit. I quitted him in anger, and went into the next room, whence I could hear him muttering to himself as he stalked up and down my parlour. It was full ten minutes before he went away. Upon reviewing his conduct on this occasion, I felt convinced that 'twas he who had stolen the dagger; and it was not long before my suspicions went further, and pointed to him as the murderer of Everard Lestrange.'

'Strange!' I exclaimed, 'strange that I should never have thought of him in connection with that crime.'

'You do not know the wretched, half-demented creature as well as I do. My suspicions once aroused, I watched him closely every night at the theatre, and soon perceived that he was suffering from a suppressed agitation which made it difficult for him to

get through the smallest scene, or attend to the routine of his business behind the scenes. He was strangely absent, much paler than usual, and started when spoken to. Other people observed the change in him, but only remarked that mad Johnson was a trifle madder than usual. I took occasion to test him by telling him of your danger, and ventured some conjectures as to the real assassin, and I saw that every word I spoke went home. But he put on a dogged air, and told me that Sir Everard Lestrange deserved to die, and that it was a good thing there was one of my lovers got rid of. "I am a woman who can exist without a lover, sir," I said to him, "but I cannot endure that an innocent man should perish. If you can throw any light upon this business, for pity's sake speak, and save a guiltless fellow-creature." "What should I know of it?" he cried angrily, but with a countenance like death. This kind of conversation was repeated between us several times, with variations. I could perceive that the unhappy wretch became hourly more distracted. On Saturday last, when I knew he was engaged at a rehearsal, I went to the house where his bedridden mother lodges, and contrived to see the old woman who waits upon her. I will not trouble you with a minute

account of our conversation, but from her I heard enough to confirm my suspicions. Before this I had communicated my ideas to Mr. Oole, who waited upon me daily. It was he who thought of questioning the tavern waiter, when he heard that the supper was brought to the door almost immediately after the murder. To be brief, Robert, I believe that my reproaches, and his own tormented conscience, so worked upon that poor creature Johnson, that he could at last no longer support his existence. He bought a pennyworth of arsenic, and swallowed it last night, and about an hour after, believing himself dying, had himself put in a chair, and brought to my house long after midnight, to ease his mind by acknowledging his guilt to me. The dose, however, was not strong enough to be fatal. Hannah Surfet and I plied him with antidotes all night long. I took down his confession from his own lips, and made him sign it, with Hannah and myself for witnesses to the signature, lest he should die before he could exonerate you. He was very weak, poor unhappy creature, and declared that if he lived to see the morning's light he would willingly give himself up to justice. "I would rather be hanged half a dozen times than endure the anguish I have suffered

within the last week," he said. Oh, Robert, I hope he may not live to be hanged !' cried Margery.

'We must intercede for him, dearest,' I answered. 'There is little doubt he was demented when he did the deed. The magistrate called him a madman to-day. I do not think it would be impossible for us to get him off as a lunatic.'

She sighed, and sat downcast, looking into the fire.

'What a miserable woman I am, Robert, to be the cause of so much mischief !'

'Nay, my dear, there was a fatality in this, and I cannot but consider Mr. Johnson the instrument of Divine vengeance.'

She was not easily to be comforted, and in the hope of distracting her from these gloomy thoughts, I began to speak of our future, and of the change that had come to my fortunes since my journey to Hauteville.

'It was not worth while talking of Lady Barbara's will while I was under suspicion of a felony, which would have confiscated my inheritance,' I said, 'but now that I am in a fair way to regaining my liberty, we may speak of it. If that will can be established, we shall be rich, Margery.'

'We shall be rich,' she repeated slowly, with a thoughtful air, 'you and I; but Lady Lestrange will be reduced to poverty.'

The sudden mention of that name moved me, in spite of my philosophy.

'Nay, my dear,' I said, 'we have no reason to suppose that the loss of the Hauteville estate will make Lady Lestrange a beggar. She has her own fortune.'

'She *had* her own fortune, which in all probability Sir Everard has spent, to the last sixpence. I have heard as much.'

'In that case it will be in our power to prevent her suffering any inconvenience from the loss of Lady Barbara's estate. I can settle an income upon her—so arranging it that she shall believe it was bequeathed to her by Lady Barbara—and we can give her the free use of Hauteville House while we are in India.'

She was silent, still contemplating the fire, with a pensive countenance; nor could I succeed in banishing that sadness which had come upon her after the first burst of pleasure with which she greeted me.

The next day saw me a free man, after I had gone through certain formalities which I need not linger to describe. I was free, and went back to my

chambers in Brick Court, where my father and I hobbed and nobbed in very much the same free and easy fashion that had obtained years ago between Mr. Hay and myself.

We both dined with Mr. Swinfen on the night after my release, and he informed me that he had not the slightest apprehension of opposition from Lady Lestrange or her representatives on the question of my rights under Lady Barbara's will.

'As for Lady Lestrange herself,' he said, on which my foolish heart must needs begin to beat furiously, 'nothing could be more noble than her conduct. She protested she had always believed Lady Barbara would leave you handsomely provided for, and she was therefore in no way astonished by the discovery of the will. In a word, she is a very high-minded woman, and you have no difficulty to fear from her. Her lawyers were inclined to cavil, but on our second interview they informed me that their client forbade any attempt to dispute the will. "Generous," said Mr. Theobald, the senior partner of the firm, "but foolish! A document produced in such a manner should have been disputed tooth and nail."'

'You saw Lady Lestrange while I was in prison,'

I exclaimed eagerly. 'Did she believe me to be her husband's assassin?'

'She did not,' replied Mr. Swinfen, decisively. 'On the contrary, she took the trouble to inform me of her belief in your innocence. "But I have put the case into the hands of others, Mr. Swinfen," she said, "and I cannot help what they do." She was much distressed, poor soul, and I had to assure her that we should get you out of trouble shortly.'

To know that Dora had never thought me guilty was an unspeakable relief. I called upon Mr. Swinfen alone next morning at his chambers, to take counsel with him upon the alteration in Lady Lestrange's circumstances which would be brought about by the discovery of the will.

'I am told that Lestrange squandered every penny of her private fortune;' I said, 'and as he had very little to get from his father, Sir Marcus, I apprehend that the loss of the Hauteville estate will leave her almost a beggar.'

Mr. Swinfen shrugged his shoulders, and took a turn up and down the room before he answered me.

'I have very little doubt that the gentleman got rid of his wife's fifty thousand pounds before he came into the Hauteville estate,' he said presently, 'for I

know he was in the hands of the Jews when his father died. Nor had Sir Marcus anything of his own to leave, except the lease and furniture of the house in St. James's Square. And I am sorry to tell you that your Hauteville estate is but the shell or wreck of what it once was. A mere stately husk, with the kernel eaten away. Sir Everard has mortgaged house and land up to the eyes. Of course you have a claim upon his heirs, executors, and assigns for every penny of income derived from the estate since the death of Sir Marcus, with interest thereupon. But one cannot get blood out of a stone.'

'Then the discovery of this will does not make me a rich man?'

'No, Mr. Ainsleigh, it makes you the owner of a considerable estate, considerably encumbered. But still it is worth something to a man to be Robert Ainsleigh, of Hauteville Park, and the place must be pleasant to you from old associations.'

'The place is very dear to me. But suppose this will had not been discovered, and Lady Lestrange had inherited Hauteville from her husband, pray what would her pecuniary position have been?'

'She would have had what you will have—perhaps

a balance of three or four hundred a year after the interest on the mortgages is paid.'

Farewell, then, to my dream of Dora at Hauteville —a place which could only be maintained, even in the simplest fashion, at an expenditure of as many thousands. I could now understand the settled decay that had fallen upon mansion and grounds. The life-blood had been drawn away from the old place to sustain Sir Everard Lestrange's gentlemanly wickednesses.

'Lady Lestrange must have the income, whatever it is,' I said, after a few minutes' thought. 'I am going back to India, where I can live upon my pay. You must contrive to make her believe that Lady Barbara left her an income chargeable on the estate.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed Mr. Swinfen. 'She has been furnished with a copy of the will.'

'Could you not invent a codicil—which may fairly have been discovered since the finding of the will?'

'I am not fond of inventions,' said Mr. Swinfen; 'nor do I think Lady Lestrange is a woman to be easily duped by such a contrivance as you suggest. It is a pity,' he added, looking at me with a meditative air, 'that the business cannot be managed another way.'

I was quick to guess what he meant, and felt myself changing colour as he looked at me.

'There is no other way that I can propose,' I said gravely. 'As for Hauteville, it would be most entirely at the lady's service, were she inclined to occupy it, and rich enough to keep it up. It is very unlikely that I shall be able to live there for the next ten years. I am going back to India almost immediately after my marriage.'

'Your marriage! What, are you positively going to be married, Mr. Ainsleigh?'

'Yes. Mrs. Hunter is shortly to become my wife.'

'The actress of Drury Lane!' exclaimed Mr. Swinfen, with an air of wonder that stung me; and yet I knew him to be ignorant of Margery's antecedents.

'Yes, Mr. Swinfen,' I replied, 'the actress of Drury Lane—the noble woman whose sense and courage have saved me from the gallows!'

'Well, I can scarcely wonder that you should be eager to give her so strong a proof of your gratitude. There is a certain prejudice against such a marriage; but this lady is beautiful, a genius, and of unsullied character, I am told, despite the pursuit of Sir

Everard. I daresay you might do worse, Mr. Ainsleigh; yet I am free to confess it is not the union I——'

'Oh, sir,' I exclaimed, 'there are not many of us so happy as to gratify our first choice.'

I urged him once more to manage the matter of the codicil for me, assuring him that I myself was in no need of the income arising from the Hauteville estate, and so left him.

Three or four days after this interview I received a letter from Lady Lestrange's solicitors, informing me that their client had surrendered all ownership in Hauteville House, and all lands thereunto belonging, and that I could assume possession of the same at my pleasure. The next country post brought me a communication from Mrs. Grimshaw, to the following effect:—

'Hauteville House,
'*10th November*, 1757.

'Sir,

'As I am apprised that you are become (by a strange caprice of Fortune, which does not always bestow her favours on the most deserving) the owner and master of this house, I beg to tender my resignation of a post which I have now occupied with, I

venture to affirm, some credit to myself and much profit to my employers, for five-and-twenty years, since neither the promptings of interest—to which, I thank God, I have ever been proudly indifferent—nor the affection for a familiar place which springs from the habit of long years, could reconcile me to a situation in the household of one whom I regret to be unable either to esteem or respect. This mansion, which has of late years been maintained in a somewhat pinched and poverty-stricken manner, will henceforward, I opine, be suffered to lapse into complete decay, as I cannot conceive that the income of a foreign adventurer will support the expense of a country seat; nor can I imagine that your own habits or inclinations would dispose you to occupy so respectable a home.

'I leave my keys in the custody of your friend and ally, Mrs. Betty, to whose sole charge I commit a mansion which once maintained forty servants, and which in its present degradation and decay inspires the mind with pity, almost as profound as that which moved the Prophet Jeremiah for the fenced city that had become an heap.

'I have the honour to be, Sir,

'Your Servant,

'MARTHA GRIMSHAW.'

And here I may fairly take my leave of Mrs. Grimshaw, who retired to a respectable lodging in the High Street of Warborough, so close to Brewer's Yard that her ears might be gratified by the melodious voices of Mr. Noggers's congregation bawling their hymns as she sat by her own hearth; and here she lived for thirty years in the odour of sanctity, her black poke bonnet and dismal visage a favourite subject of ridicule for the children of the town. The time came when my own rascals learned to caricature this venerable dame in the margins and fly-leaves of their lesson-books. The closing years of a respectable and rancorous existence were tormented by a deadly quarrel, arising out of I know not what, with Mr. Noggers's successor; and at the fag-end of her life Mrs. Grimshaw deserted the followers of Wesley and returned to the fold of the Established Church. When I think of her sour womanhood and her desolate old age, I can but wonder at frail foolish humanity, which can be so constant in hate, and take so much trouble to do harm.

There was now nothing to hinder my union with Margery except our mutual concern for that unhappy sinner, Johnson, who languished in gaol, sick almost to death, awaiting his trial. I had pleaded

this poor creature's cause very warmly with Mr. Swinfen, and that gentleman, whose heart was ever ready to compassionate the distressed, had entered upon the subject with unusual earnestness. The prisoner was examined by several physicians, the majority of whom pronounced him quite sane enough to be responsible for his actions, but of a temperament so excitable as to touch very near upon the confines of madness. One learned gentleman happily declared him a confirmed lunatic, and on this evidence, and a petition to His Majesty, we relied for saving the unfortunate creature's life.

Margery and I visited him constantly while he lay in prison, awaiting his trial.

The arsenic he had swallowed before he gave himself up to justice had been quite enough to make him seriously ill, and he was now confined to his bed, and attended daily by the gaol surgeon. We carried him such small luxuries as his condition required, and did our best to sustain his spirits. He was meekness itself, but not so much cast down as one might have expected to find him under such circumstances. He spoke with a most heroic calmness of the prospect of being hung; and I do verily believe that he rather hankered for the gallows,

[illegible] notorious and even famous manner of ending his days.

'The world will remember me as one who, like Othello, loved not wisely, but too well,' he said with a satisfied air.

His feeble condition, which in no manner improved as the days wore on, inspired me with the hope that death might mercifully intervene to save him from the hangman, or from that alternative doom which reflection had taught me to consider something worse than the scaffold. Should the physician's evidence be strong enough to convince a jury of the prisoner's lunacy, what would be his fate? To be immured for life in a pauper madhouse, at the mercy of gaolers more brutal than any within the walls of Newgate or Bridewell. Better the darkest end that could come to a man's life, than existence indefinitely prolonged under such conditions as these.

There were times when I thought that Johnson could not live till the day appointed for his trial; but he did survive, and sat in the dock, the veriest spectre, I imagine, that ever appeared in a place where so many ghastly countenances have been seen. His trial was brief. Judge and jury rejected the notion of his madness, without a moment's hesitation.

'He had sufficient wit to earn his bread by the trade of a stage-player for the last ten years of his life—an occupation requiring peculiar gifts of memory and quickness of apprehension—and all we are told of his character by those who knew him in the exercise of this vocation is, that he was somewhat singular in his manners, and extravagant in his conversation. Why, gentlemen, if every scoundrel who committed a crime of this kind were to be let off as a madman on the score of some eccentricity in his habits or his speech, our madhouses would be stuffed with such murderous vermin, and the hangman might find his calling a sinecure. The prisoner was sane enough to steal the dagger, and to carry it about him for three days in secret. He was sane enough to lie in wait for his victim, and to attack him in a safe and cowardly fashion from the rear. What, gentlemen, are our legislators to be struck down thus, in the streets of London, by every jealous fool who chooses to harbour a grudge against his superiors, and the villain to go scatheless because there is some fantastical doctor willing to pronounce him a lunatic?'

This was the gist of the speech made by the counsel for the prosecution. The counsel for the defence had no right of reply, and the judge, in his

charge to the jury, bore heavily upon the ghastly wretch who sat shivering in the dock. The jury were absent only ten minutes, and the verdict was that which I had but too surely forecast.

We spent that night with the doomed sinner in his cell, and had the satisfaction of seeing much spiritual comfort administered to him by the chaplain of the gaol—a kindly soul, whom that horrid scene had not hardened. He was very ill, and when I left him in company with the surgeon, that gentleman informed me he had but a few days' life in him.

'"Twere a pity he should hold out till Monday,' he said thoughtfully. 'He is in a very bad way; his constitution could never have been good for much, even at its best, and has been undermined, I fancy, by hard work and harder living. That arsenic very nearly did his business; indeed, the effects of the poison are still hanging about him, and, taken in conjunction with the state of his mind, has brought him to the condition in which you see him.'

'God grant him a blessed release,' I exclaimed, 'between this and Monday!'

My prayer was heard: Mr. Johnson expired on Saturday night, Margery and I being with him in

his final moments. He was conscious to the end, and committed his desolate and afflicted mother to our care.

'She is a very old woman,' he said, in a tone that might have melted the sternest, 'and can hardly trouble you long. I commend her to your charity, Margery.'

It was the first time I had ever heard him address her by her Christian name.

He repeated it with a smile upon his face, and died before the smile had vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

I REGAIN MY LIBERTY.

THERE now remained no impediment to my union with Margery, and I was desirous that the ceremony should be performed without delay. We were already in December, and to keep within the bounds of my leave of absence, I must certainly sail in January; and in delaying so long as this I ventured to make sure of a seven months' passage, on my return to Bengal as well as on my homeward voyage—a second stroke of good luck which might not befall me; indeed, sailing, as I must do, in the dead of the winter, the chances were strongly against me.

I explained this to Margery, and urged upon her the necessity of despatch. I begged her to write to her father, asking him to bring his wife to London at once, to witness their daughter's wedding.

'We will be married on Christmas Eve, Madge,' if you like,' I said; 'it is a holy day, and the cere-

mony that is to bind us for life will seem all the more solemn on such a vigil.'

'The ceremony that binds us for life, Robert,' she repeated with singular gravity; 'have you considered what that means?'

'Yes, dearest, as completely as I have considered the value of the prize I am to gain by that ceremony.'

'The prize!' she cried, bursting into tears. 'Oh! Robert, have you forgotten the night you spurned me from you in the house by the Fleet Prison?'

'For God's sake, do not remind me of that!' I exclaimed, stung to the quick by the allusion.

'If we were man and wife, Robert, do you think it would never come back to your mind? It would, and you would hate me.'

'Margery,' I said earnestly, 'let all the circumstances of that horrid night be blotted from your memory, as they have long been from mine. Sure, my love, from the hour when, as children, more innocent than the birds in the woodland, we talked of mating, Fate must have designed that you and I should be united; for see how strangely our destiny has brought us together at the end!'

'Ah, Robert! but if it were not for thy happiness we should come together; if——"

'Nay, Margery,' said I, 'there is but one subject you ever speak of that can make me angry, and you have hit upon that to-night.'

'I will say no more, but oh! Robert, there are doubts that gnaw the heart.'

I was silent. Disputes of this kind were beyond measure galling; but Margery left me no leisure to chew the cud of my vexation. She had taken up her guitar next minute, and was singing me Rosalind's ditty with her full, fresh voice; and after that she told me a story of Garrick, mimicking the bashaw of Drury Lane to the life.

I made all necessary arrangements for our wedding on Christmas Eve. We were to be married at Margery's lodgings, in the evening; and Captain Briggs, who was home again, and full of concern for all I had suffered during his absence, was to be my best man.

'I must needs be uncommonly fond of you, Bob,' he said, to accept such an office, 'for it is like signing my own death-warrant. Sure, I would give twenty years of my life, were the sum of my future existence but five-and-twenty, to stand in your shoes on Christmas Eve.'

It was in vain that I urged my wishes with

reference to Lady Barbara's will upon Mr. Swinfen. He absolutely refused to have any hand in the fabrication of a codicil, and protested against so great a folly as the endeavour to impose upon Lady Lestrange's good sense by so shallow a fiction. Without his aid I felt powerless to act, since Dora knew him to be concerned in my interests, and would hardly be inclined to accept any document as genuine that should be unsupported by him. I was therefore reduced to the miserable necessity of knowing her impoverished by my good fortune, and must either remain inactive, or run the risk of revealing myself as her would-be benefactor. This hazard I could not bear to encounter. To my mind, she appeared so lofty and divine a creature, that I shrank with horror from the notion of bringing her down to the vulgar level of a pecuniary transaction.

'I wonder that you give yourself so much concern upon this matter,' Mr. Swinfen said rather impatiently, when I had been vainly endeavouring to alter his resolution, 'and I think you pay a very ill compliment to Mrs. Hunter, your wife that is to be, by this eagerness to make away with your fortune for the benefit of another lady. Sir Everard Lestrange's widow has friends of her own family,

and they no doubt will be quite as ready as yourself to come to the rescue. She has already left St. James's Square, and has taken up her abode at Highgate, with her aunt, a Mrs. Joshua Hemsley, the widow of a wealthy merchant. No doubt she can have a home there for life, if she pleases. But I dare say she'll marry again before next midsummer.'

I left Mr. Swinfen's office in much trouble of mind, and having no better occupation for that evening, which was the penultimate night of Mrs. Hunter's dramatic career—she was to take her farewell of the public on the next—I walked out to Highgate by way of calming my spirits, and took the trouble to inquire for Mrs. Hemsley's house, at an inn, where I refreshed myself with a glass of white wine. The tapster directed me to a row of handsome houses on the brow of the hill, the first of which, on the London side, was Mrs. Hemsley's. It was a square red brick mansion, large and imposing, with a fine lantern in the roof—a house which I afterwards ascertained had been built by a son-in-law of Oliver Cromwell.

On this moonlit December night there was no sign of human life to be seen upon the stately façade of the

mansion—no lighted window—no open door with a trim maid or a pompous footman peering from it. All was dark and silent. I paced the road for about an hour, thinking of her who dwelt within that sombre habitation, speculating—alas! how idly—on what her life might be in the days to come, when I was on the distant shore of the Indian Ocean. St. Paul's sonorous chimes sounded the hour of ten before I turned my back upon the house and walked down the hill towards the city.

I was too much out of tune to see Margery that evening, though I had half promised to sup with her after the play, so I wandered on without thinking where I was going, until I strayed so far eastward as to lose myself in a labyrinthine neighbourhood close to the docks—that strange semi-marine world which appears to have no characteristic in common with the rest of the City. The tall spars, which rose like a forest of timber against a sky of deepest indigo, under the full round moon, seemed verily to have brought with them the odour and breath of the sea. Here I wandered till late into the night, doing battle with my rebellious soul; and having succeeded at last in thoroughly wearing out mind and body, I went back to my chambers, some-

what calmer and less depressed than when I left them.

The next night was Margery's triumph; and rarely, I conceive, has so intoxicating an ovation rewarded the labours of genius as that with which the public greeted Mrs. Hunter at the close of this farewell performance, when the curtain having fallen on *Romeo and Juliet* she came forward, and with a most touching air of humility and gratitude, delivered a brief valedictory address which Mr. Garrick had been so obliging as to compose for her. The theatre rang with a universal thunder of applause; and I was especially glad of this enthusiasm on the part of the public, as Jack Hawker and his wife, who had come to London that day, were among the audience. These simple creatures were seated with me in a side-box which I had hired for the occasion, and never did I see so genuine a rapture as that with which my foster-father shared the triumph of his child. The poor mother sat in silence throughout the play, weeping copiously in a corner of the box when the lovers' troubles thickened; but Jack never left his seat in the front, whence he surveyed the stage and audience with a radiant countenance. And he afterwards informed

me that it was with some difficulty he restrained himself from crying out, 'Bean't she a beautiful creetur! and she be my darter, ladies and gentlemen,' —an address which, I think, would have produced an original effect upon that fashionable assembly. His indignation against Capulet knew no bounds; and he also told me, in the same confidence, that he had much ado to refrain from pitching his stick at that 'hoary old villain.'

'Why, Robin,' he exclaimed, 'I never knowed that play-actin' wur like this here, and that I should see my darter in a house that's as fine as the King's palace, with all these fine folks goin' mad about her. There bean't a prouder father in London than John Hawker this night. God bless her! Robin; she's the beautifullest creetur that ever walked upon this earth; and to think that we've been parted all these years!'

We were all to sup together in Surry Street, and never can I forget the joyful tenderness with which the father embraced his child, when we all met in Margery's parlour.

'I forgive thee everything, thou dear vagabond,' cried Jack, 'for the sake of to-night. Eh, but thou hast made thy old father proud. To see the ladies

and gentlemen clapping and waving their pocket-handkerchiefs like mad; and yet so quiet, you might have thought 'em all turned into stone, when you and the young gentleman was in trouble. But, Lord save us! how pale thou art, child; art sure thee didst not swallow any of the p'ison?'

'Dear father,' cried Madge, laughing, 'it was an empty bottle.'

'Lord save us! Well, I thought they'd have real p'ison, and that you'd only make-believe to drink it.'

'It was all make-believe, dear father. But I am so glad you and my mother were pleased.'

''Twas downright melting, Margery,' said the mother; 'and 'twas so like life, that when the young gentleman dragged thee out of the tomb, I thought thou wert dead in real earnest, and I should never hear thy sweet voice again. I was all of a tremble till you came in front of that green blind and spoke to the people. I should never like to see thee do that again—it was too real.'

'You are not likely to see it again, dear mother. I have trodden those boards for the last time.'

She ended this speech with a faint sigh, expressive of a regret which, I doubt not, is natural to all who

have once tasted the fire-water of public applause, on setting aside the intoxicating cup for ever.

But whatever sadness this thought might have caused seemed transient, and, until the close of that meeting, Margery was at her brightest—full of playful tenderness for her parents, and of consideration for me. If I could have found fault with her for any reason, it would have been that her gaiety was somewhat wilder than I should have cared to see it, and that in the abandonment of her mirth there was something of that recklessness which prejudice has been so apt to charge upon her profession. But a man must have had the saturnine humour of my Lord Chesterfield—who, in his recently published letters to his son, thanks God that he has never laughed since he attained years of discretion—to disapprove of manners that were so full of fascination, and conversation that brimmed over with fun and animal spirits. I left her with Mr. and Mrs. Hawker, at two o'clock in the morning, more than ever impressed by her beauty and vivacity.

'Were a man but heart-whole when he first looked upon her, how madly he might love her!' I thought; and then I asked myself whether that kind

of mad love was half so enduring a passion as the more serious affection, born of gratitude and esteem, which I felt for her. There now wanted but three days to our marriage, and it had been arranged between Margery and myself that I should spend the intervening time in a brief visit to Hautevjlle, in order that I might inspect the estate of which I was master, and make all necessary arrangements for the proper preservation of the old place during my absence in India. The dear girl would fain have had me travel post, in a chariot and six, in honour of my altered position, but I preferred to take my chance in the coach, which had carried me before.

I found Mrs. Grimshaw and her confidential maid departed, and Mrs. Betty in sole possession of the rambling old mansion. She took me through all the rooms, and pointed out so many dilapidations —crumbling ceilings, split panels, loose banisters on the great oak staircase, broken flags in the marble-paved hall, windows that would not open, and doors that would not shut, and so many leakages in the roof, which feature of the building appeared to be an ingenious architectural device for the concentration of rain-water in particular spots,

that I began to think my inheritance of Hauteville House was something like that gift of a white elephant, which Oriental tyrants are said to bestow upon a subject whom they desire to ruin. It would have needed some thousands to put the place in good order, according to Mrs. Betty, who made the most of all defects. No words can paint the desolation of the rooms, the dismal mouldiness that brooded over their faded splendour, the haunted air which made me fancy a lurking figure behind every half-open door, the mysterious sounds of unearthly footfalls in the distance which our feet awakened. Yet, in spite of every melancholy thought—and the place inspired some of the saddest—I had an infinite satisfaction in the sense of freedom with which I explored the familiar mansion, knowing myself its master. There was not a room that I could not people with the dead; not a memory connected with the place that did not awaken my keenest regrets, and yet I fancied that I could be happier here than anywhere else.

'You'll let the house, I suppose, sir?' said Betty; 'Mrs. Grimshaw said as how you would.'

'Mrs. Grimshaw was wrong,' I replied; 'Hauteville has never yet been prostituted to the use of

strangers, and I will not be the first to degrade it.'

I made my arrangements on the spot. Mrs. Betty was willing to remain; she was used to the place, and liked the place, though it was lonesome, she told me; and she did not mind the rumours of 'ghosteses and spectreses,' that were prevalent concerning it. She was also acquainted with a respectable willing man, of the gardener species, and his wife—industrious people, and related to herself in some occult manner by the bonds of second cousinship with her eldest sister's husband, who, she believed, would serve me for small wages, in consideration of a comfortable home and a permanent employment. With two women and a man, the house and gardens might be kept fairly enough, Mrs. Betty informed me; and if I would please to employ a builder from Warborough, to make the roof waterproof, I need give myself no further trouble about the place till I returned from India.

This arrangement being completed in a satisfactory manner, I went back to Warborough, to call upon a local solicitor who had received rents for Sir Everard Lestrange, and knew the exact

condition of the estate. With him I went the round of the land, let off in farms of from thirty to three hundred acres, and from him I ascertained, that after paying the interest on the mortgages with which Sir Everard had encumbered Hauteville manor, I should have something like four hundred a year left for my own uses. I made a mental calculation as to how long it would take me to pay off the mortgagees by the accumulation of this modest income at compound interest, and I found that, to succeed in such an operation, I must needs attain the respectable age of the famous Parr. Whereupon my thoughts flashed across the sea, towards spoils of Indian cities and Brahminical temples.

I went back to London on the twenty-third, and in the early winter dusk found myself again at Temple Bar. There reigned an almost unearthly quiet in the courts and cloisters of the Temple, as I walked through them on the way to my chambers —a quiet that set me thinking of that night, nearly eight years ago, when I had returned from the theatre to find Philip Hay crouching on my threshold. How strangely are our lives interwoven with the memory of the dead! I had

his voice in my ears to-night as I mounted the stair.

Never had my sitting-room looked more dismal and sordid than it did to-night, when I surveyed it by the glimmer of a newly-lighted candle. The shabby furniture, dusty and neglected, for Margery had not been here of late,—the hopeless litter of papers on the faded baize cover of a battered oak desk,—the boots, and canes, and swords, and crumpled ruffles cast pell-mell on one table,—the disordered pile of books upon another: all these things bore witness to the miserable state of a bachelor.

'It will be all changed to-morrow,' I said to myself, 'and my life will belong to another.'

At this moment my eyes were attracted to a letter lying on the table by which I stood—a letter addressed in Margery's hand, and which was bulkier and more important-looking than the little flying billets she had been used to send me—sometimes half a dozen in a day.

I broke the seal with a strange foreboding of I know not what, and began to read a letter that changed the current of my life:—

'DEAREST ROBERT,

'Will you think me the vilest, most capricious of women, when you read what I am now going to write? Will you condemn me in a breath, without a pause for mercifuller thoughts than can accompany your first indignation at fancying yourself cheated by an inconstant woman? Nay, dearest, you who are so grave and wise, will surely judge me better. You will believe that I have loved you —that to the end of my existence here, I must still continue to love you—better than I have ever loved myself. When you read this, I shall be far away. Oh, my love! I have no words to describe those agonies of mind which I have suffered in the past few months—agonies of doubt and self-reproach, which have poisoned even the joy of your company! How often have you reproached me for groundless jealousy—for foolish petulance. Those humours sprang from a heart ill at ease with itself. Robert, I *knew* all the while that you were sacrificing your own inclinations to a mistaken sense of gratitude for services so small, that they were scarce worth one kindly pressure of your honest hand—one tender throb of your warm true heart. I knew it, and yet was base enough to let the sacrifice go

on; but not without many a struggle with my own selfishness. Dearest, from first to last, I knew that you had never loved me—that there was a dearer and a purer image for ever intervening between you and me; but I fancied that in the days to come, by such devotion as few wives have given their husbands, I might still be happy enough to win your regard. Then came a shock that crushed all my hopes. Sir Everard Lestrange's death left *her* free, and I knew that your future existence would be one long regret for the unlucky bond that tied you to me. Had you demanded your release at this time, I should have freely given it: and could I be so selfish as to hold you to a promise which you were too generous to revoke? I knew the course that honour counselled, but could not steel my soul against your goodness. You hurried on the date of our marriage with a too generous impatience; and I, in my low selfishness, had almost allowed you to consummate the sacrifice of all your fondest desires. At this last moment, Robert, Heaven has given me the strength I have sought so long in vain. Yes, dearest, with that support I am strong enough to bid you farewell. You will see me no more till you have become the

husband of another,—yet, until death, I shall remain ever your faithful

'MARGERY.'

This was all: not a word, not a hint, of her destination or the plan of her future life: I could scarcely take this letter in earnest. She was trying me, perhaps, as she had done more than once by speeches that cut me to the heart. I hurried at once to her lodgings, where I was informed that Mrs. Hunter had left town at seven o'clock that morning, in a glass coach-and-four, with her father and mother; but the landlady, who told me this, could give me no information as to where the travellers were bound; she could only express her conjecture that they were going a long journey.

I showed my father Margery's letter on the morning of that day which was to have closed with my marriage.

'Before Heaven, Robert!' he exclaimed, as he read, 'this woman is as noble as she is lovely. And were her apprehensions well founded, child? Do you really prefer Lestrange's widow to this bright creature that half the town is mad about?'

'Do you desire me to tell the truth, sir?'

'Unquestionably.'

'I never loved but one woman in my life, and that woman is Dora Lestrange.'

'Then thou art, beyond measure, happy in this release. Ay, Bob, I have passed through the furnace, and know what I say. A marriage founded upon pity or gratitude is a mistake so fatal, that all the wisdom of a man's after-life cannot mend it. There is no worse blight; no deeper ruin can befall him. Thank God, you are out of it!'

He gave a vast sigh of relief, as if he felt a burden lifted off his own shoulders.

Yes, if I chose to accept Margery's letter as an order of release, I was free—free to seek her to whom I pledged my faith years ago in the lamp-lit Vauxhall Garden. Yet, could I thus coldly discard the fondest and truest of women? Could I fling her off whom I had sworn to cherish?—to whom I owed my life twice over, and that which is dearer than life, my good name? Honour forbade the thought of so vile a treason. I went to all whom I had known or heard of as Mrs. Hunter's acquaintances, and, last of all, applied to Mr. Garrick, who would, I considered, be likely to know something of her

affairs. But from none of these could I obtain any satisfaction. The manager showed me a letter which Margery had written to him on the eve of her departure.

'I am about to leave England for some time,' she wrote, 'finding myself in sore need of a holiday that will afford relief of brain as well as of body, and I know not what countries of Europe I may traverse. I have a fancy for seeing Juliet's tomb at Verona, dear sir, and whether it is really like the canvas cupboard your carpenters set for me at Drury Lane; and I shall, if possible, see Venice, and discover whether such a lady as Belvidera ever lived there. But whether I go first to Italy, or waste six months in Holland, or loiter away the best part of a year at Paris, is at present undecided. You were so offended at my leaving the stage, that you may perhaps be not altogether displeased to learn that I have serious thought of some day returning to my old walk of life, if the fickle public do not in the meantime forget me.'

'Forget her!' cried Mr. Garrick, passionately, 'we have not had such an actress since Woffington was young.'

Verona, Venice, or Holland, or Paris. It was

a wide itinerary. Yet I determined to follow her. In order to do this, it was necessary for me to obtain an extension of my leave, which I procured, with less difficulty than I had expected, from the gentlemen at the India House.

My father was very angry when I informed him of my resolve, rated me for my Quixotism, and tried his hardest to dissuade me from the pursuit I intended.

'What!' he exclaimed, 'you run away from the woman you do love, to follow the woman you don't! Was there ever such a madman?'

I persisted, however, and my father, whose leave of absence was now nearly expired, went with me to Havre, where we parted company, very mournfully on my side, and I believe with some sadness on his.

'I would, sir, that you could leave this alien army?' I said, at parting.

'Nay, Robert; the country I serve has been better to me than the land of my birth. It would be a base desire if I wished to turn my back upon her.'

So I left him, and made a somewhat rapid pilgrimage from Havre to Paris, where I instituted a close inquiry as to the late English arrivals—an inquiry I repeated afterwards in all other places

where I halted, and always in vain. Thence through Holland, then on to Italy, with no result as regards Margery, but with some pleasure and consolation to myself. I remained abroad something less than the six months I had begged at the India House, and came back to arrange for my passage to Calcutta early in June.

CHAPTER XIII.

I FIND A PEACEFUL HAVEN.

NEVER can I forget that calm summer evening on which I paid my second visit to the old house at Highgate. Never can I forget my sensations as I mounted the hill, and halted for a few moments, breathless, not from fatigue, but from the fluttering of my foolish heart, which was too full to be quiet. The city lay below me, bathed in a soft golden haze. Westward, the sky was a flame, and far up in the still evening sky glimmered a faint crescent moon.

I had seen Mr. Swinfen, and from him had heard that Lady Lestrange was still residing at Highgate with her aunt, Mrs. Joshua Hemsley. Yet, as I drew near the house, before which I had played sentry that bleak winter's night, six months ago, my mind was full of frivolous apprehensions. Dora might be away from home—or she might be

disinclined to receive me. A newer and brighter image might have banished my humble figure from her recollection. The terrors and tortures which afflicted me were the terrors and tortures that are common to uncertain lovers. I need not complete the catalogue.

The little village was as tranquil as if it had been situated at the other end of England. I heard the geese screaming on a patch of green by the high road. Every flutter of the leaves sounded in the summer stillness, and, I think, the throbbing of my own heart would have been audible to any one who had passed close by me at that awful moment, when I pulled an iron handle at the tall gate, which set a clanging bell ringing as loud as for an alarm of fire.

A fat black footman opened the door, and told me that Lady Lestrange was at home; but, on my asking to see her, said she seldom saw visitors, and he would send for her maid, whereupon he rang a bell in the hall, which was answered by a page, whom the pampered negro, evidently too lazy to budge himself, despatched with my message. I was mean enough to say I desired to see Lady Lestrange on important business.

The maid appeared presently—a rosy-faced young woman, with a Berkshire accent—and asked my name, which I was constrained to tell her, though I was most anxious to take my dear love by surprise, and learn my fate from the change in her sweet face when she met me.

'My mistress lives very retired, sir,' the girl said, 'but I will tell her your name, if you will be so kind as to wait while I go to her.'

She ushered me into a spacious panelled drawing-room, with four long windows opening on a garden—a room in which there was a delightful sense of coolness and repose. I went straight to one of the open windows, and, advancing towards me, along a wide grass walk between an avenue of climbing roses, twined on poles, I saw the woman I loved.

She looked pale as a lily in her long trailing black dress, but at sight of me grew paler still, yet came on to meet me with a steady footstep, and gave me her hand with the calmest grace in the world. But in that one blessed moment, when our troubled glances first met, I was assured that she loved me.

There followed the usual greetings—gracious

questionings as to where I had been, and what I had been doing, since that awful time when I had lain like a felon in Newgate. We walked up and down the grassy path between the roses, and talked until the moon—which had been such a pale shadow when I mounted the hill—shone silver bright in a deep blue sky. Yet no word had been spoken of love. Nor did I speak until at the last, when the church-clock had struck eleven, and I was fain to apologize for the length of my visit.

'It may be a farewell visit, Dora,' I said, in a low voice, as we stood on the threshold of the window, whence I had first seen her, 'unless you will have it otherwise. I am going back to India in something less than a month from to-night. I feel that it would be ignoble to turn my back upon so glorious a struggle as that which is still in progress yonder.

'Going back to India?'

'Yes. I owe my friends there a little more of my life, Dora; and if I ever live to return—to return perhaps after two or three years' absence—shall I find myself still remembered—greeted as kindly as I have been to-night? Oh, Dora, you must know the prayer that is trembling on my lips!

Will you keep my image in your heart—will you believe that no creature on this earth ever loved you so truly as I?'

'No,' she cried, with a little hysterical laugh, 'I will not sit at home to remember you, Robert. I have played Penelope long enough. I will go with you.'

I clasped her in my arms, and the tears of ecstatic joy which I shed as I pressed her to my heart were not shed alone; for, when I saw her face under the moonlight, the sweet eyes were dim with weeping.

We were married within a week of that date, in that enchanted drawing-room at Highgate, at seven o'clock in the evening, and posted off to Hauteville afterwards through the summer dusk, and under the summer stars. It was my darling's fancy that our honeymoon should be spent in that neglected old mansion where first I met her.

We were still upon the first stage of our journey when Dora asked me a question.

'When you were very ill in the Temple, Robert

—oh! so near dying—had you any strange fancies?'

'One, dearest, that haunted me all through the time when I was at my worst. I was almost sorry to get better, and find it a delusion.'

'And what was that?' she asked shyly.

'I fancied that you were with me—that your gentle hands ministered to me in the long dismal nights—that your sweet face bent over my bed.'

She clasped her hands with a cry of joy.

'You *do* remember, then, Robert? Yes, I was with you in that dreadful time. It was I who sent away your wicked old nurses, and brought a woman I could rely upon—an old Hauteville servant—to nurse you. I persuaded your doctor to keep my secret, and when I saw your senses were coming back, dear, I left you. I never thought you would have remembered me.'

L'Envoi.

For five years my wife and I shared all the shifts and dangers of military life in a strange country. I was with Clive at the relief of Patna, and fought the Dutch under Colonel Forde. By good fortune I

escaped being sent to the Carnatic, where our troops were fighting the French, and where I should have been under the constant apprehension of finding myself in arms against my father, from whom I heard so rarely that I knew not when he might be ordered out to India.

I did not return to England until Clive had restored peace to Bengal, by which time I had two dear children, whose tender age demanded English rearing.

Oh, happy sunsets on the Indian Ocean, when my wife and I sat together to watch the swift approach of the tropical night, with our copper-faced ayah and her nurslings squatting on a mat at our feet!—happy days of summer *idlesse*, in which we had nothing to do but talk of home, and plan the calm life before us! Not in my fondest daydream did I ever imagine it sweeter than it is.

I bear my grandfather's title now, and am Colonel Ainsleigh, but have become something more of a country squire than a soldier. Our pastures and cattle prosper; and what with prizes in India and the profits on a well-managed domain at home, the mortgages upon Hauteville are dwindling away, and I hope to leave my eldest boy, Roderick, an

unincumbered estate. We have no town-house, but the dear old mansion at Highgate is our home during the parliamentary session, when I work hardest, having won for myself what my dear wife calls 'a name' in the House. I take Dora to the theatres occasionally, and when first I returned from India we used to see Mrs. Hunter, who was still the darling of the town; but she retired from the stage in sober earnest soon after my return, and now lives in a pretty cottage on Twickenham Common, scarce a quarter of a mile from Kitty Clive's. Here my children visit her every summer, and come home laden with toys and sweetmeats, and enchanted with the beautiful lady.

'Is she so very much more beautiful than I am, Roderick?' my wife asked the boy once, with an arch glance at me.

'Oh, yes, two times as boofitle, mamma!' replied the candid urchin.

'And yet, you see, papa liked me best.'

'Oh, but perhaps he had never seen the boofitle lady at Twitnam.'

'Or, perhaps, she never gave him any sugar-plums,' put in Miss Barbara, aged four.

So my children think the Twickenham cottage a

paradise in little, and my wife carries them there sometimes, and spends the day with Mrs. Hunter; but Margery and I have never met since the night we supped together after the play, when I thought her spirits too wild in their reckless gaiety.

APPENDIX.

[The following matter, chiefly of an historical and retrospective character, has been transferred from earlier portions of the work. Its statements are entirely trustworthy.]

Note A.

When I first saw Calcutta, nothing could well be darker than the aspect of affairs in that presidency. John Company held his ground as yet only on sufferance, and by virtue of handsome payments to the Soubahdar, whose rule was at once nearer and stronger than the somewhat shadowy sovereignty of Delhi. Nor was the Soubahdar the only power our Company had to fear. France had in these days an apparently sure footing in Hindostan, while her interests were well cared for and her power audaciously pushed by Joseph Francis Dupleix, the Governor of Pondicherry. It was but five years since the bombardment of Madras by the French Admiral, De la Bourdonnais, ending in the capitulation of that town and the Governor of Pondicherry's infamous violation of the treaty of surrender, whereby the Admiral had pledged himself to restore the settlement on payment of a moderate ransom. This notorious treachery had resulted in triumph to the traitor and disgrace to the honourable man, who

strove hard to redeem his word with the English, and who, on his return to France, was flung into the Bastile, and left to languish there for a period of three years, as an encouragement for future honourable-minded admirals. For here I think we may fairly retort upon M. de Voltaire the jest which he afterwards made about our own unfortunate Admiral Byng; since the iniquitous sentence that deprived Byng of life was no more cruel than the slow torture which murdered De la Bourdonnais, a much greater man.

Dupleix, on the contrary, had succeeded in elevating himself to the giddiest summit of power by a series of intrigues with native princes and native usurpers. He was now Governor of the Mogul dominions on the coast of Coromandel, from the river Kistna to Cape Comorin. He affected an Oriental magnificence, known only to native princes, and displayed amongst his splendid insignia the princely badge of the fish; while his friends boldly affirmed that ere long the Mogul on his throne would tremble at the name of Dupleix. The English beheld these triumphs of a rival nation with an indifference that might proceed from either apathy or despair. They made no attempt to stem a torrent that threatened to overwhelm them, and Major Laurence, the commander of the troops, chose this critical juncture as a fitting time for his return to England.

Note B.

In order that the narrative of these adventures may be clear to the reader, it may be well for me to give the following description of the condition of Hindostan and her rulers, as I received it from the lips of my patron, Mr. Holwell:—

'You must accept all that you have heard and read of the Great Mogul and his absolute power as a page of past history that ended with the death of Aurungzebe. When that master-spirit sank in the grave, the soul of Timur expired with him. It is not fifty years since that great man died, at ninety-four years of age; and indeed it seems as if to such unscrupulous and commanding genius there belongs a power that can protract life beyond its natural limit. In that half-century seven emperors have sat on the musnud of Delhi, but one among them worthy to occupy the throne of his ancestors; the rest weak slaves of their favourites, and weaker slaves of their own vices. Hence the power that once extended to the utmost boundaries of Hindostan, and ruled its haughtiest deputies with a rod of iron, is now little more than a shadow. Soubahdars and nabobs no longer wait to be appointed by a mandate from Delhi, but audaciously seize on territories, which they still more audaciously bequeath to their sons, or adopted sons, after them; while, with unparalleled impudence, they impose on the common

people by pretended delegates from the imperial city, before whose spurious dignity they bend their stubborn knees, and from whose hands they receive forged credentials with an assumed humility that deludes and satisfies an ignorant populace. For the last half-century the most dangerous force of the East has been that of the Morattoes—a nation of hardy mountaineers—natives of the hilly regions that extend from the borders of Guzerat to Canara. They are the Swiss of India—ever ready to fight on the stronger side, and able to change leaders with the varying breath of fortune. This is a power which first arose in the palmy days of the Mogul empire, and has fattened upon that empire's decay.'

'Then you consider the despotism of Delhi a power of the past?' I asked.

'Yes, Robert. Delhi has seen the last of her greatness. Her splendour sank in an eternal eclipse, when the shepherd monarch of Ispahan, Nadir Shah, and his Persians, invested the city, to retire thence with thirty-two millions' worth of loot, after such a work of ravage as was new even to Hindostan. Shade of Timur, that was indeed a degradation for the chief city of thy Tartar race!'

From Mr. Holwell's conversation I learned the history of the Mogul empire during the last century. It was a bloody record of ambition and treachery, and I, who came fresh from a Christian country, was struck with horror by the crimes of a people whose religion I have heard philosophers extol as little inferior to the faith of Christ. The farther I carried

my retrospect, the longer was the list of iniquities which the history of the past revealed; and as a monotonous sameness characterizes the murderous deeds of these Mahometan usurpers, I will not burden this chronicle by going farther back than to the reign of Shah Jehan. This noble follower of the Prophet distinguished himself in early life by the quiet assassination of his elder brother and an unsuccessful rebellion against his father, a feeble-minded monarch, very much under the governance of his wife, and who, after beginning his reign with a little private business in the way of murder on his own account, assumed the modest surname of Mahomet Jehangire, or Conqueror of the World. Shah Jehan, knowing the family failing, wisely inaugurated his reign by a happy despatch, per dagger or bowstring, of all the male posterity of Timur, except himself and his four sons. Had he made the exception still narrower, and included the four young Timurs in the general massacre, he would have shown himself a wise man. One of these Tartar cubs was Aurungzebe, who, in early life, acquired the character of a harmless religious enthusiast without a grain of ambition. But when the pious prince engaged in warfare and subjugated two of his brothers, betrayed and imprisoned the third, possessed himself. by stratagem of his father's person, and, having safely bestowed that ancient ruler under lock and key, caused himself to be importuned by his nobles, whose entreaties so touched his tender nature —like the prayers of the Duke of Buckingham in

that famous scene of Shakespeare's *Richard III.*— that he submitted to assume the royal power under the title of Aulum Geer, or Conqueror of the Wind.

Aulum Geer, *alias* Aurungzebe, proved himself a wise and prudent despot. He took speedy means to dispose of his best friend and ally, Meer Joomla, whom he despatched on a warlike expedition, which resulted in the destruction of his army by privation and disease, and his own untimely death, whereupon Aurungzebe had the candour to remark that he had lost 'the greatest and most dangerous' of his friends.

After languishing in a prison, made tolerable to his senility by the amusements of a well-furnished harem, Shah Jehan expired, and there were not wanting slanderers to whisper that a noxious infusion of poppy-juice, called *poust*, a favourite slow poison of these Orientals, had somewhat accelerated his death. But the subjects of the Mogul empire were too busy for minute inquiries on this point. The emperor was bent on the subjugation alike of Mohometan and Hindoo rulers. He made war upon Morattoes and Sikhs, Rajpoots and Affghans, using sometimes the pretext of religious fervour, sometimes the right of an offended chief, and, having subdued the two sovereigns of the Deccan, and made himself almost master of the Carnatic, he closed a reign of half-a-century in a harassing and useless struggle with the Morattoes, and died a natural death in his camp, thereby considerably varying the common close of a Mogul sovereignty.

The successors of Aurungzebe are scarce worthy of being chronicled in the same page with so wise and renowned a tyrant. Jehandar Shah, the grandson of this great man, allowed himself to be governed by a public dancer, whose very name of Lall Koor sounds disreputable to the English ear. After wasting his days and nights in debauch, and outraging the feelings of his omrahs, or nobles, this Jehandar was deposed and strangled, and his dead body exhibited in the streets of Delhi at the behest of his nephew and successor, Ferokhshere.

Nor did the usurper show himself better worthy to occupy the musnud than the kinsman he displaced. He also inaugurated his accession by the butchery of every man he had reason to fear. He also submitted to the base dominion of favourites, and, as the historian Ferishta remarked of one of his predecessors, 'delighted in the soft society of silver-bodied damsels with musky tresses.' I should scarcely have recorded his name save for the fact that to this emperor the East India Company owe the phirmaund which gave them their richest privileges in Hindostan. Mr. Hamilton, a surgeon travelling with an embassy from the English Company, had the good fortune to cure the emperor of a malady which the unskilful treatment of his native physicians had failed to subjugate. Ferokhshere bade the English doctor name his reward, and the generous Briton solicited privileges for the Company. These privileges included the extension of the Company's territory, the reduction and simplification of the duties hitherto

paid by them, the exemption of their goods from stoppage and examination under cover of a passport or dustuck signed by the president of Calcutta, with other protections and exemptions of equal importance. The grant promised by the emperor was only secured after much intrigue and counter-intrigue; but the English embassy was patient, and did not take leave of the Mogul until his royal phirmaund had been obtained.

From the Court of Delhi Mr. Holwell bade me look to the Deccan, or southern provinces of India, where the master-mind of Nizam-al-Mulk had created a sovereignty scarcely second to that of the Moguls, and which his daring had rendered independent of the imperial power. The Nizam had given up the ghost, after more than a century of life, in 1747, and since his death the sovereignty of the Deccan had been the subject of unceasing contention. But here I must again indulge in a retrospective glance, even at the risk of appearing prolix, and in order to make my narrative complete, it will be well for me to quote Mr. Holwell's description of the aspect of affairs upon the coast of Coromandel, where Clive was at this time winning his youthful crown of laurels.

'It is just twenty years since Sadatulla, a regular and acknowledged Nabob of the Carnatic, died, much regretted by his subjects, after appointing his nephew and adopted son, Dost Ally, to succeed him. His dying wishes were quietly fulfilled, but not without inspiring secret aversion in the breast of Nizam-al-Mulk, soubahdar of the Deccan, since the accession

of Dost Ally to the subordinate kingdom of the Carnatic took place without reference to his authority. It is, however, a peculiarity of the Mahometan mind to smother its resentments, and to patiently await the opportunity of revenge.

'Dost Ally had two sons, the elder of whom, Subder Ally, had attained to man's estate at the time of his father's accession; he had likewise several daughters, one of whom he gave in marriage to his nephew, Mortiz Ally, another to a more distant relation, Chunda Saheb, who became his dewan, or treasurer, one of the most powerful officers of the state.

'This Chunda Saheb was a man of limitless ambition, a supreme master of all the native arts of intrigue. On the death of the Rajah of Trichinopoly, an independent Hindoo state, he was sent with Subder Ally to obtain possession of the city, and by a series of false pretences contrived to seduce the garrison and imprison the dowager queen, who died of grief and humiliation at finding herself thus betrayed. It was even whispered that the unhappy woman had fallen in love with her base betrayer, and that it was by the softer arts of the lover Chunda Saheb penetrated the citadel.

'Once master of Trichinopoly and its appertaining kingdom, Chunda Saheb showed himself bent on keeping his conquest.

'The Nabob, who cherished a high opinion of his son-in-law's genius, dared not recall him from his new power. Chunda Saheb, without openly throw-

ing off his allegiance to such an indulgent master, took care to improve the defences of Trichinopoly, and to plant his two brothers in the strongest towns of his little kingdom.

'Nizam-al-Mulk's hatred of Dost Ally and his race was only increased by the extension of their possessions, but as he was obliged to keep his arms turned towards Delhi, where he was equally dreaded and detested, he was unable to assail this aspiring family in person. In this dilemma he had recourse to the Morattoes, and gave those savage mountaineers permission to attack the Carnatic; thus by the same stroke wiping out his obligations to that race and gratifying his own resentments. This permission of the soubah's was like the loosening of some mighty mountain stream, that carries sudden devastation to the valleys below its source. A hundred thousand Morattoes under Ragojee Bonsala swept across the western barrier of the Carnatic before Dost Ally was able to collect his forces to oppose them. Bloody was the struggle that followed. The treachery of an Indian officer gave the Nabob and his army into the hands of the foe. Dost Ally and his younger son, Hassan, fell dead from their elephants on the field of battle, and with the common result of a leader's death amongst Oriental armies, immediate rout and ruin followed their fall.

'Subder Ally had happily taken refuge in the stronghold of Vellore, and from that citadel he made terms with the triumphant Morattoes. He then assumed the title and authority of Nabob, and Chunda

Saheb came to Arcot to do homage to him, with a splendour of retinue and military force that made him appear the equal rather than the dependent of Subder Ally. In the December of the same year, however, the Morattoes returned, in consequence of a secret engagement with Subder Ally, invested Trichinopoly, intercepted and slaughtered the two brothers of Chunda Saheb—the severed head of one of whom they sent him as a confirmation of his brothers' defeat—and after a siege of three months, finally subjugated the city, and captured its resolute defender, Chunda Saheb, whom they carried off to a strong fort near their metropolis of Sattarah.

'That ambitious spirit, Chunda Saheb, being thus safely bestowed at a remote distance from the Carnatic, and the Morattoes appeased by the conquest of Trichinopoly, Subder Ally might have enjoyed his kingdom in tolerable security but for his ever-present fear of the Nizam, whose wrath could only be appeased by the payment of those large arrears of revenue which the late Nabob, Dost Ally, had withheld. But to part with his treasures was a sacrifice which Subder Ally could not bring himself to make, and he strove to soften his creditor by humble excuses and pretended poverty, even giving out that he intended to go to Arabia, and end his days in acts of piety at the tomb of his Prophet.

'His poverty and devotion were alike assumed, but the late calamities had made such an impression upon his mind that he left the defenceless city of Arcot, and took up his residence in the fortified

citadel of Vellore, the strongest in the Carnatic, while his family and treasures were placed under the care of the English at Madras; for it is a notorious testimony to British honesty that these heathens will often trust us when they dare not trust each other.

'Unhappily for this cautious sovereign, danger lurked within the citadel of Vellore, more dire, because more secret, than the perils of unfortified Arcot. Mortiz Ally was the Nabob's brother-in-law, bound to him by every tie of gratitude and affection; but amongst these people such ties count for nothing when once interest is at stake. The Nabob knew that inherited wealth and parsimonious habits had made Mortiz Ally the richest man in his dominions, and was determined that he should contribute to the satisfaction of the greedy Morattoes in common with the other governors of the province. None of these gentlemen were too well inclined to disburse their treasures, and needed but the example of a respectable leader to refuse obedience to the Nabob's demand. They, therefore, took occasion to hint to Mortiz Ally that Nizam-al-Mulk, the Soubah of the Southern Provinces, would be inclined to favour rebellion against a prince who had defied his vice-royalty.

'In the East, rebellion generally means assassination. Mortiz Ally was at once avaricious, ambitious, revengeful, and cowardly. He never moved, even in his own palace, without the protection of his guards, and never tasted food or drink until his wife had

affixed her seal upon the vessel that contained it. For such a character the Nabob entertained the most profound contempt, and at last, wearied by Mortiz Ally's repeated excuses for withholding the payment of his arrears of the assessment, went so far as to threaten him with displacement from his government if he persisted any longer in such trifling.

'This imprudent threat was the spark that fired the train. The discontented governors flattered Mortiz Ally's ambition, promising to acknowledge him chief of the Carnatic, in the place of his brother-in-law. The traitor now only waited his opportunity to strike.

'This seemed difficult to seize. Subder Ally's army lay within the suburbs and under the walls of Vellore. A numerous guard attended him within the fort. Mortiz Ally was too great a dastard to dream of open violence, and only showed himself more than usually servile after the insult he had received from his brother-in-law. The assassin might, indeed, have waited long for his opportunity had it not been afforded by the singular imprudence of the Nabob himself.

'At the chief religious festival of Mahometan India, Subder Ally's servants asked permission to absent themselves for two or three days, in order to celebrate their pious orgies in their own families. The unsuspecting Nabob, contrary to all courtly etiquette, suffered all his retinue and guards, except four persons, to leave him, and even desired that some of

Mortiz Ally's officers and servants might attend him, in the absence of his own.

'The governor of Vellore was prompt to seize so excellent an occasion. Poison was at first attempted, and failed. But even this attempt did not awaken Subder Ally to the consciousness of his peril. He gave a ready ear to his enemy's servants, who attributed his illness to one of the bilious disorders so common in India. On this followed a night of horror, during which the gates of Vellore were shut against all intruders. Among all his subjects, Mortiz Ally found but one man willing to execute his orders. This was an officer whose wife the Nabob had dishonoured. The assassin entered Subder Ally's apartment at midnight, at the head of a band of Abyssinian slaves, upbraided him with his wrongs, and stabbed him to death as he was in the act of escaping by a window.

'Mortiz Ally endeavoured to appease the Nabob's army by a somewhat lame account of their master's death; but the general opinion of his character was such that the soldiery flew to arms, declaring that their sovereign had been murdered by the Governor of Vellore. The attachment of these devoted creatures, however, had its price; and on Mortiz Ally bidding high for their affection, they consented to waive their desire for vengeance, and agreed to accept him as Nabob of the Carnatic some forty-eight hours after the murder of Subder Ally Khan.

'The new Nabob made a triumphal entry into the chief city of Arcot, and for some time all went merry

as a marriage-bell, until several of the principal officers of the Carnatic discovered that they sympathized in a profound detestation of their new master; while the army, finding that Mortiz Ally's liberal promises had not resulted in ready-money, surrounded his palace, and tumultuously demanded their due.

'This was enough for the timorous Nabob, who immediately fled from Arcot to his stronghold of Vellore, disguised in a woman's dress and shrouded by the curtains of a palanquin, only to reappear when the time was again ripe for treachery and murder. Upon this, Seid Mahomet Khan, the youthful son of the murdered Subder Ally, was immediately proclaimed Nabob, and removed under the guardianship of his mother from Madras to Wandewash, a fortress in the command of his uncle by marriage. The sagacious and powerful old soubah, Nizam-al-Mulk, having for the moment no danger to fear from Delhi, now appeared upon the scene, supported by an army of eighty thousand horse and two hundred thousand foot. He was at once indignant and surprised by the state of anarchy which prevailed in the Carnatic, where every governor of a fort and every commander of a district had assumed the title and state of Nabob. "Scourge me the next son of a dog who dares approach my presence under the name of Nabob!" cried the proud old Viceroy; "for I have this day seen no less than eighteen Nabobs in the Carnatic, whereas I imagined there was but one in the Southern Provinces."

'The son of Subder Ally was among the visitors

who did obeisance to the Soubah. Nizam-al-Mulk did not permit this young prince to return to the safe-keeping of his uncle at Wandewash, but gave him into the charge of his own officers, who were bidden to show the lad all possible respect. The Composer-of-the-State then returned to Golcondah, and gave the sovereignty of the Carnatic to one of his generals, who had the misfortune to be found dead in his bed on the morning appointed for his departure to his new kingdom, not without suspicion of poison.

'This somewhat suspicious decease resulted in the appointment of An'war-adean Khan, whose enemies were not slow to hint that he who most profited by the death of his predecessor was the person whose unknown hand had hastened that event. An'war-adean was the son of a learned Mahometan, deeply versed in the original text of the Koran, and one of the religious officers attached to the person of the late mighty Aurungzebe. The new Nabob was a brave and prudent officer; but the people of the Carnatic cherished a warm affection for the race of Dost Ally, whose descendants had governed them with a gentle hand, and Nizam-al-Mulk found it prudent to assert that An'war-adean was appointed only as a regent until such time as Seid Mahomet, the son of Subder Ally, should be old enough to reign. In the meantime the boy was placed under An'war-adean's guardianship, in a position that somewhat resembled that of a famous young prince of the House of York under the tender care of his kind uncle Gloster.

'An'war-adean treated his charge with all show of kindness, despite any natural jealousy which may have been aroused in his mind by the general joy with which the populace had welcomed the youth on his return to Arcot. Installed in the palace of the fort, Seid Mahomet had no possible cause for uneasiness, save the somewhat clamorous demands of the Patans, a body of Mahometan soldiers from the extreme north of Hindostan, whose hardihood, courage, and audacity distinguished them from all other inhabitants of the empire. These men had served Subder Ally, and they now tormented his son by daily demands for their arrears.

'In the month of June, the young prince, as head of his family, was called upon to preside at the marriage festival of a kinsman, which was to be celebrated with all pomp in the fort of Arcot. Invitations were sent far and wide to the bride-groom's kindred, many of whom were governors of cities in the Carnatic.

'Amongst these was Mortiz Ally. The prince was bidden to conceal his natural aversion, and to receive the murderer of his father with all Oriental courtesy. It was thought by many that the cowardly governor of Vellore would not trust himself outside the gates of his stronghold upon an invitation from the son of his victim; but to the general surprise he presented himself among the guests of the young prince, and was treated with distinguished respect by the regent, An'war-adean Khan.

'The marriage festival was not suffered to proceed

without interruption from the insolence of the Patan soldiers, twelve of whom, with their captain at their head, broke through the ceremonial pomp of the prince's court, to urge their demands with even more than common insolence. They were repelled by Seid Mahomet's servants, at first with contumely, and in the end with violence; such an outrage as is rarely offered to this proud and insolent people without provoking a sanguinary and immediate revenge.

The thirteen Patans, however, received this rebuff with unusual meekness, and on the same day tendered their humble apologies for the morning's violence. Their submission was readily accepted, and all was calm; yet it was but a deceitful tranquillity, which presaged the coming tempest.

'With evening came the most brilliant hour of the festival. Seid Mahomet, with Mortiz Ally, and most of the other guests, were assembled, when the approach of the Regent Nabob was announced. The young prince, desiring to pay his venerable guardian public homage, passed into the vestibule, intending to receive him at the bottom of a flight of steps leading to the court of the palace. The thirteen Patans were among the spectators in this lower court, and as the prince appeared, surrounded by his guests, and attended by his officers and guards, these haughty warriors greeted him with demonstrative reverence and affection. After these compliments, their captain rapidly ascended the steps, as if about to cast himself at the feet of his offended

lord, and having thrown Seid Mahomet's attendants off their guard by his contrition of countenance and manner, suddenly drew his dagger, and with one blow pierced the young prince's heart.

'In an instant the vestibule flashed with naked swords. The assassin was cut to pieces on the spot, and ten of his companions were sacrificed by the furious crowd below. Amidst this scene of horror An'war-adean Khan appeared, and promptly gave such orders as were necessary for the discovery of the conspirators; since it was the general cry that the Patans had only been the venal instruments of some hidden power.

'Nor was it long before a vengeful murmur arose, coupled with the name of Mortiz Ally. The governor of Vellore had been beside the prince as he fell, but when he was now sought for, it was discovered that he had availed himself of the general confusion to fly from Arcot, attended by a large body of cavalry and other troops, which had been awaiting him in a spirit of caution that argued a foregone conclusion. Pursuit would have been worse than useless, for no equal force of cavalry was ready on the instant, and the distance from Arcot to Vellore was but twelve miles. Curses and imprecations on the murderer's head rang out upon the air which had so lately echoed the tinkling of lutes, and brazen clash of cymbals, and all the joyous sounds of eastern festival. The populace, dispersed by an order from An'war-adean Khan, retired to their homes in gloomy silence, or gathered stealthily in secret companies to communicate their dark sus-

picions. The Nabob not only dismissed every Patan in his service, but ordered that no member of that nation should remain an hour longer in the city, and that their houses should be razed to the ground—the last mark of infamy which Oriental justice can inflict upon a malefactor. Yet, so given to suspicion is the public mind, even this conduct did not hinder the assertion that the murder of Seid Mahomet had been plotted by An'war-adean and Mortiz Ally.

'Such whispers having reached the ear of the Nabob, he strongly denied all share in a crime which he boldly attributed to the governor of Vellore, and challenged his detractors to the proof of their foul slanders. Mortiz Ally, for his part, as boldly accused the Nabob, but brought forward no proof to sustain his assertion; and it was supposed that the same evidence which would have condemned An'war-adean must also have demonstrated his own guilt.

'Favoured by Nizam-al-Mulk, and sheltered by his vice-royal power, An'war-adean held his ground as Nabob of the Carnatic; but his government was not the less hateful to his people. The death of the Nizam, in 1748, was the signal for revolution. And now the spirit of European intrigue allied itself to the plotting genius of the East. Dupleix, the governor of the French establishment of Pondicherry, had long since secretly fixed on Chunda Saheb, as a member of Dost Ally's race most gifted with the talents of intrigue. Now followed plot upon the heels of plot, revolution upon revolution. Nazir Jung, the son of the late Nizam, and Moozuffer Jung, his

grand-nephew, contested the government of the Deccan. Chunda Saheb, ransomed from the Morattoes by French gold, moulded Moozuffer Jung to his own ends, and struggled for dominion in the Carnatic; while Dupleix, like the monkey in the fable, waited till his catspaw should have snatched the prize, to grasp it for himself; and if not actually aspiring to Oriental sovereignty upon his own account, was at any rate bent upon elevating to power a Soubahdar of the Deccan, and a Nabob of the Carnatic, who should be little more than the instruments of his will. To what height this aspiring man might have reached, and what extended dominion France might have acquired in the East, had not the English at last awakened from their ignominious apathy, I can hardly venture to calculate.

'For some time the rebels were triumphant. An'-war-adean was slain in an engagement, at the age of one hundred and seven years. His eldest son was taken prisoner during the same struggle; and his second son, Mahomet Ally, with the remnant of the army, escaped to his government of Trichinopoly. Success favoured the arms and intrigues of Dupleix and his two allies. The powerful hill-fortress of Gingee, hitherto deemed impregnable, was taken by the French under Bussy; Nazir Jung was slain under circumstances of some treachery; his nephew and opponent, Moozuffer Jung, installed as Soubahdar of the Deccan; and the ambitious Dupleix made governor of all the countries south of the Kistna with Chunda Saheb for his deputy at Arcot,

'Moozuffer Jung was not permitted long to enjoy his triumph. He perished in an attempt to subdue the ever-rebellious Patans, who, having helped to raise him to the throne, were insatiable in their demands for reward. At this perilous juncture, the French interest was protected by Bussy, who instantly proclaimed Salabut Jung, eldest surviving son of the Nizam, Soubahdar of the Deccan. This prince confirmed all the grants made to Dupleix, and it may be fairly said, that at this period the governor of Pondicherry wielded a power superior to that of the Great Mogul himself.

'While a plotting French politician and his general had thus contrived to seize the dominion of Southern India, the prospects of the English Company were of the darkest hue. Mahomet Ally, the one chief friendly to the British Government, was reduced to the single possession of Trichinopoly; and nothing appeared more likely than that the whole Carnatic would fall into the power of Chunda Saheb, from whom we English could expect neither favour nor mercy. Against the audacious intrigues of Dupleix, and the military skill of his generals, we could only oppose the prudence of a petty trade committee; since Colonel Lawrence was at this most critical epoch absent in England on private affairs. Menaced with certain ruin in the event of Chunda Saheb's extending power, and insulted by the French, who planted their white flags upon almost every field around the English boundary, and even within the English limits, it was time that forbearance and neutrality should cease.

'In this dark hour, when British pride had been humbled to the very dust by the rapid successes and undisguised insolence of a rival power, there arose upon the clouded horizon a star which, as I think, is destined to mount yet higher in the military heaven. While Colonel Lawrence was still in Europe, and in the absence of orders from England, Robert Clive, with an innate military genius, took the helm of affairs, and Arcot, the chief city of the Carnatic, was seized by a handful of English soldiers, held against a siege of fifty days' duration, and secured to the English ally. This was but the beginning of triumphs. Other engagements as brilliant have followed in rapid succession, and thus Robert Clive, at the age of twenty-six, has undermined the French power in the Carnatic, humbled the pride of that most ambitious nation; and founded the renown of British arms in India.'

Thus ran my patron's record of affairs past and present upon the coast of Coromandel. It was during my own residence in India that the young captain, whose name had already become synonymous with victory, enjoyed a signal triumph at Trichinopoly; but before this new conquest, the daring chief, Chunda Saheb, had terminated his adventurous and troubled career under circumstances of peculiar cruelty.

His affairs having become desperate, he accepted a deceitful promise of protection from Monackjee, the general of the Tanjore forces. It is possible that Monackjee gave this pledge in good faith, but finding all other powers bent on disputing his possession of

so illustrious a prisoner, this barbarous Tanjorine put his too-confiding captive to death, and despatched the head of Chunda Saheb as a bloody offering to his rival and enemy, Mahomet Ally.

Such was the state of affairs upon the southern coast when I entered upon my new duties as Mr. Holwell's secretary. In Bengal all was quiet. The Nabob Allaverdy Khan, in his actions in the present, showed himself a beneficent ruler and an amiable man; but when I ventured to say as much to my patron, Mr. Holwell regarded me with a somewhat ironical smile. 'Yes, Bob,' he replied, 'the Nabob is a very indulgent ruler, and no doubt altogether an excellent person; but for all that I should scarcely care to trust too much to his honour. I tell you, boy, these Mahometans are false to the marrow of their bones, and treachery is as natural to them as truth and honesty are supposed to be to John Bull; though I have found, by the way, that even that blustering gentleman can tell a lie when his interest pushes him to it.'

'Will you tell me why you think badly of Allaverdy, sir?' I asked, ever curious about the rulers of this strange empire, which seemed to me wonderful as a glimpse of fairyland, and ancient as a page of Herodotus.

'You shall hear the darkest passage of his life, Robert, and form your own judgment upon it. He and his brother, Hodgee Hamed, began their careers as penniless adventurers, the sons of a wily Tartar, and rose to power by the favour of Sujah Khan, Nabob

of Bengal, Behar, and Orixa, who made the elder brother, Hodgee Hamed, his Prime Minister, and the younger, Allaverdy, general of his troops, and ultimately governor of Behar. Each well suited his allotted post, the elder being versed in the arts of suppression and diplomacy, while the younger had all the best gifts of a military leader. The two were closely bound to each other, for self-interest, in this case, strengthened the ties of relationship.

'The short-lived gratitude of the East did not long secure to Sujah Khan the fidelity of these favoured subjects. A conspiracy was ripening for the casting aside of all authority on the part of the deputy governor of Behar, and Sujah, apprised of this treachery, was meditating vengeance, when Nadir Shah, the Persian Alexander, and his forces, swept like the whirlwind across Hindostan, and every eye was turned to Delhi. Before the Persian had left the imperial city, Sujah died, and his profligate son, Suffraze Khan, succeeded to his sovereignty.

'The vices of this new ruler were eminently favourable to the ambitious plans of the two brothers. Suffraze quickly contrived to offend all his influential subjects, amongst others Juggat Seat, the head of the princely banking-house of Muxadavad, whose son's wife he insulted by an act of supreme folly. Hodgee promptly traded upon his master's errors. A plot was hatched, and Allaverdy invaded Bengal. The reigning Nabob was slain, after a nobler resistance than might have been expected from so vicious a man, and Allaverdy pushed boldly onward to

Muxadavad, where he was proclaimed Nabob of Bengal, Behar, and Orixa.

'The power thus audaciously seized was not long unassailed. The proud and wily Composer-of-the-State, Nizam-al-Mulk, took alarm, and incited the Morattoes to attack the new Nabob. Eighty thousand of these hardy warriors swooped from their mountain strongholds upon Allaverdy's new dominions; and long and desperate were the struggles that inaugurated the Nabob's reign. The Morattoes ravaged the country, collected the revenues of almost the whole of the territory south of the Ganges, and after being beaten, routed, and driven out of Allaverdy's dominion one year, reappeared the next, with renewed strength and unconquerable audacity; nor could handsome payments on the part of their victim assure him of exemption from attack.

'In Eastern politics, when affairs grow desperate, treachery is not far distant. Finding himself powerless to cope with so strong and slippery a foe, Allaverdy pretended a desire to treat, and proposed a personal conference with Baschir Pondit, the general, and moving spirit of the Morattoe army. Doubting the good faith of the Nabob's professions, Baschir Pondit refused his consent to this interview until Allaverdy had sworn on the Koran that no treachery should be attempted. It was agreed that the two leaders should meet in a tent pitched on the open plain, each attended by an equal number of officers and unarmed servants. But the care of providing the tent was left to Allaverdy, who had contrived to

hoodwink the Morattoe general by offering to send his wife to visit the wife of Baschir Pondit, a social concession of supreme importance in this land of ceremonies.

'At the appointed hour the two chiefs advanced to the tent, each attended by the most distinguished of his officers, while in the distance a long train of covered palanquins, supposed to contain Allaverdy's wife and her retinue, was seen moving towards the Morattoe camp. What passed within the tent has been told by many, and seldom told alike. Enough is known to stamp the work of that hour as one of the darkest deeds ever committed on this wicked earth. At a signal, fifty armed men sprang from the sides of the tent, which had been constructed with a double lining to afford ambush for the assassins. The Morattoe general and his captains were massacred to a man; but Allaverdy did not draw his sword. He only looked on and approved the carnage. When the work of slaughter was finished, a signal of attack was thrown out, and the Bengal army rushed at once upon their disorganized foe. The Morattoes fled in confusion, only to re-assemble and renew the war with redoubled fury.

'Ten years of harassing warfare followed that day of treason; and a treaty of peace, arranged between the Nabob and his hydra-headed foe, is not yet ratified. But the Morattoes have been propitiated by subsidies and concessions, and Allaverdy, now a very old man, has received his patent from the sorely enfeebled powers of Delhi, on condition that he shall

annually remit the tribute of six millions of rupees. The courage and fortitude he has displayed in overcoming innumerable difficulties have endeared him to his people, despite the murder of Baschir Pondit, and a few minor treacheries, which his subjects indulgently ascribe to the account of Hodgee Hamed, who fell a victim to the anger of his enemies, and expired, universally execrated, some years ago. To his own people he has been a just and not unkind master; with the English Company he has on the whole dealt fairly, although he has shown himself somewhat exacting in money matters. But, take him for all in all, I fear we are likely to have reason to regret his loss.'

'How is that?' I asked.

'Because his nephew, and probable successor, Mirza Mahmud, is a cruel voluptuary, who hates the English, and, indeed, loves nothing but his own sensual pleasures. He has enjoyed a princely education, which in the Oriental sense of the word means the slavish flattery of parasites, and the unrestrained indulgence of every vicious propensity. The favourite amusement of his childhood was the torture of birds and animals; the diversions of his manhood consist in the society of profligate menials and low buffoons, and in the gratification of a propensity for intoxicating liquors, to say nothing of other vices, which serve to mark the contrast between himself and his great-uncle, ever a temperate man, and the faithful husband of one wife.'

'And is this wretch certain to become Nabob?'

'I believe there is little doubt of it, though the appointment has not yet been formally made. The people of Bengal look forward with terror to such a ruler; but Mirza Mahmud has contrived to hide his real nature from his great-uncle, who has regarded the young man from his birth with an almost doting fondness; and amongst this servile people no one dares enlighten the old man as to his adopted son's disposition and pursuits. All we English can do is to pray that Allaverdy's years may be prolonged to the utmost limit.'

Note C.

The close of Shawamut Jung's life had been darkened by a tragedy of which his nephew, Suraja Doulah, had been the hidden cause. He was Governor of Dacca—a province which could easily become the centre of a revolution—and possessed treasures and influence which might have made him a formidable opponent in any struggle for power. Suraja Doulah dreaded this; but his treachery assailed, not his uncle, but his uncle's prime counsellor and intellectual superior, Hassein Coolly Khan. Hassein's nephew was at this time deputy-governor of Dacca. Him Suraja Doulah caused to be despatched by assassins, who entered the city disguised in the dead of the night; and before the public mind had recovered the shock of this event, Hassein himself was murdered in the streets of Muxadavad in open day.

Gloomy were the anticipations formed of the youthful director of these crimes, who, of course, denied all participation in the bloody work. While Allaverdy yet lingered, death swept both his nephews, the two uncles of Suraja Doulah, from the stage of politics. Both died of fever, without suspicion of poison, though it must be owned their removal happened auspiciously for the Lamp of Riches.

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